

THE WORLD'S FAIR SENSATION!

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Chicago Charlie, the Columbian Detective.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS.



THE LETTERS WERE RUN TOGETHER, AND THE ENDS ALMOST INDECIPHERABLE.

Chicago Charlie,

THE COLUMBIAN DETECTIVE;

OR,

The Hawks of the Lakeside League.

A Story of the World's Fair.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS,
AUTHOR OF "THE WIZARD KING DETECTIVE,"
"SINGER SAM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR.

A HEAVY-FACED, beefy man, English by birth, but whose features had such strong suggestions of the German that one could not doubt he was an Englishman of German ancestry, approached the door of a room, over which hung a small gilt sign, showing it to be the office of John Malcomb, broker.

He advanced hesitatingly, as if he doubted the kindness of his reception.

His timid knock on the door bringing no response, he rung the bell. Lightly at first; then so loudly that its echoes smote through all the corridors.

No one appeared in response, and he turned away.

He was back again in a quarter-of-an-hour; only to meet with the same experience. John Malcomb was not in; or if in, he had no desire to see visitors.

"The hoddest thing Hi've met with in a fortnit!" the Englishman with the Germanic features soliloquized. "John Malcomb 'asn't the 'abit hof being late. No prompter man hin Chicago, so Hi've told 'im. Hand 'ere 'e isn't down yet! Bejove! Hi b'lieve Hi'll call ha policeman!"

Before doing so, however, he mounted to the top of a stout step-ladder, which he found conveniently near, and, at the imminent risk of breaking his fat neck—for the ladder trembled and groaned under him as if in pain—he climbed to the transom over the office door and looked in.

He climbed down again in great precipitation, and at even greater risk, his red face turning a sickly yellow.

Picking up the high hat, which had been knocked off, he stood for as much as ten seconds rubbing it vigorously with a red handkerchief, not knowing what he was doing;—then he mopped his heated face with the same handkerchief, jammed the hat back into place, and tottered down the stairway as fast as his ponderous legs would carry him.

He did not stay so long as before. He was back within five minutes; and at his heels strode a policeman.

"What cause have you for thinking there's something wrong?" the policeman was asking, and it was noticeable that there was a suspicious, and even an anxious, note in the question.

"Hi don't think ha man would tumble down has 'e seems to 'ave done, sir! Not unless 'e 'ad the 'eart disease hor the hapoplexy, which Hi'm afraid hof hevery minite hof my life. I suppose you 'aven't hany fears hof those 'orors?"

"Not at all!" and the officer gave the Englishman a distrustful glance—a glance that seemed causeless.

They were at the door, now; and, after trying the knob, the policeman applied a key to the lock.

The key refused to turn; when, without more ado, he thrust his shoulder against the door, and, with a strong surge, forced it inward.

A startled look overspread the officer's face.

On his back, motionless and dead, with right arm outstretched and finger extended, lay John Malcomb, the broker.

It needed but a glance to show that the extended finger had endeavored to trace in blood on the wall some message or word of information—something that should furnish a clue to the murderer, for there could be no doubt that Malcomb had been slain.

He had been stabbed in the back, and had used as ink the blood which had flowed from the wound!

The Englishman seemed as much stupefied

and horror-stricken as the officer, and stared at the tracings on the wall with a fear-filled and watery eye.

"What do you make hof it?" he questioned, in a shaky voice.

The officer did not immediately answer, but stooped down and held a magnifying glass over the letters made there by the now stiffened finger. The letters were run together and the words almost indecipherable. But this he managed to spell out, after much study.

"MURDERED BY ———"

There had been an obvious attempt to write the name of the murderer, or a portion of it; but death had touched and palsied the finger before the task was completed, and the only result was a network of meaningless lines and circles.

There was not a keener man on the Chicago force than Charlie Clingstone, better known to his friends and admirers as Chicago Charlie, yet all his keenness and experience failed him here; and when he again looked at the Englishman, there was not only distrust in his glance, but an indication of deepest pain.

"Walesey, when did you see John Malcomb last?"

The inquiry so startled the man that his fat legs shook under him. He was not less surprised that the officer, who was wholly unknown to him, should thus familiarly address him.

"I believe you spoke of an appointment?" still fixing the trembling Englishman with his keen glance.

"Not han happointment, sir! You mis-hunderstood mei! But—"

"When did you see him last? Mind, now, if you don't tell the truth, I'll know it sooner or later!"

"Walesey," as he had been called, lifted his hands and protested vehemently that he had no knowledge of how the man came by his death.

"That is not the question!"

"Well, then, air, Hi met 'im last night."

"In this office, too!"

"Ow did you know that?"

"John Malcomb did not always take the trouble to sweep his office, and he employed no office boy to do it for him. You see that dust over there in the corner? There's your footprint in it, and you haven't been in that corner since we came in together!"

"Walesey" shivered as he looked at this mute evidence.

"I'm not accusing you of anything!" and Chicago Charley turned from the writing to an inspection of the dead man. "I just want you to speak the truth, whenever I ask you a question. John Malcomb has been foully murdered. Any one can see that; and I'm determined to find who killed him."

"I don't know ha thing babout it, 'pon honor!"

The officer gave no heed to the protest, but quietly went on with his examination.

What had been a pool of blood was now nothing but a suggestive stain, made black by hardened blood-clots. The soaked coat was almost dry, showing the crime to have been committed some hours before. In addition, there were indications that a ring had been taken from one of the dead man's fingers. But nothing had been taken from the room.

He saw that if the Englishman had been in the room at the time, it was as an accomplice or principal, for some one else had also been there. *And that other person was a woman!* There were prints of small shoes, and at one place the tips of small fingers had left their impress in the dust on a table!

He took a tape measure from his pocket, jotted down in a note-book the length of the shoes, the appearance of the finger-prints, and made memoranda of the other indications in the room.

Then he threw up a window and called to a brother officer in the street.

"You will take charge here for a few minutes, Mangle!" he said, when that officer came into the room. "See that everything remains just as it is. I shall be back in a few minutes. There has been murder done here, and we must get at the bottom facts."

Having delivered these instructions, he telephoned to the central police station, and turned toward the door.

The Englishman was still standing there, as if not knowing what to do.

"You are at liberty, Walesey. I think I can put my hand on you, should you be needed. There will be a coroner here, though, in a little while, and I'd advise you to attend the inquest and tell all you know, and thus free yourself from any possible suspicion. The fact that you were with Malcomb the night of his death will surely be looked into."

He passed into the corridor and ran down the broad stairway.

He hesitated on emerging into the street, and then turned resolutely toward John Malcomb's residence, taking a car at the nearest corner.

It has been said that Chicago Charlie seemed much distressed by the discovery that Malcomb had been murdered.

The look of distress deepened on his face. There was abundant occasion for it, too.

There was not a fairer girl in Chicago (at least Chicago Charlie thought so) than Daisy Malcomb, the daughter of the dead broker.

More than that, the young and popular officer and the broker's daughter were on terms of peculiar intimacy. They were lovers! The fact that John Malcomb had not looked with favor on the officer's suit, did not in anywise change these facts. Chicago Charlie had wooed pretty Daisy Malcomb, and had won her heart, in spite of the objections of her father.

He smiled grimly when the thought crossed his mind that possibly this peculiar state of affairs might bring down suspicion on his own head.

Suddenly a white look rested on his face, and he hastily quitted the car. He strove to put away the thought that had come to him. Nevertheless, he walked back toward the broker's office, and sought the man who had nightly charge of the big building.

"Your room looks out on the corridor leading to Malcomb's office, he began. "Did you chance to be here last evening?"

"All the evening, sir! I was not feeling well. I went down to the street door once, and once I went to the floor above."

"Did you see any woman enter Malcomb's office, or go that way?"

"I did, sir! Malcomb's daughter! She went up there about nine o'clock."

"Any other?"

"None, sir!"

"Did Malcomb leave the office when she did?"

"No, sir. She went away alone."

"One question more: How long did she stay?"

"I cannot tell you that. I do not remember!"

"That will do. I may have some further questions for you after awhile."

He was about to say more, but when he saw the man staring at him in wonderment, he turned away and again descended to the street.

His brain was in a whirl. He knew, in his own mind, that Daisy Malcomb was incapable of such a deed, and yet he saw what the evidence might lead to!

"I must see the inspector at once!" and he groaned aloud. "My God! it will never do for any one else to be detached for this case!"

Then he called a cab and was driven furiously away.

CHAPTER II.

CLOSETED WITH THE INSPECTOR.

BUT for his great desire to obtain an immediate interview with the inspector, Chicago Charlie would probably have hastened to the woman he loved, even though he dreaded the effect of the necessary revelation. John Malcomb had not been in all respects a model man; nevertheless, his daughter loved him, and the knowledge of his murder would come to her as a terrible shock.

The officer's heart bled, as he thought of her and of the mental anguish she must be called on to suffer. The vehicle swayed and jolted, but he did not know it; and, even though he looked out on the houses, he did not see them. He set his teeth hard, and muttered:

"I will save her from even the breath of

suspicion, if it be possible! Dear girl! she will have enough to bear. *That* would completely crush her!"

He aroused from his meditations, when the cab stopped and he saw that he had reached his destination.

The news of the finding of the body of John Malcomb, who had been murdered in his own office, was already in the possession of the inspector, when Chicago Charlie entered the inspector's room.

"Ah! you have come to make a personal report on the Malcomb case!"

Chicago Charlie had counted much on the fact that he was personally known to the inspector and had more than once received recognition at the hands of his superior. His eyes lightened, now, for the tone was kindly and even cordial.

"Sit down, and tell me all about it!" and the inspector waved him to a seat.

It took but a few words for the young officer to acquaint the inspector with the extent of his discoveries and conclusions.

"And now I have a request to make!"

The inspector glanced at him keenly.

"The evidence, as I have shown, all goes to prove that the crime was committed by a woman. And a young woman, or one not advanced beyond the period of middle life, for the impress of fingers in the dust of the table showed them to have been firm and smooth. The fingers of an elderly lady would have shown wrinkles or marks indicative of her age."

The inspector nodded. He liked this exhibition of keen insight. Still, the puzzled look remained.

"There is one woman on whom suspicion will likely fall, who I know is as free from this bloody stain as an angel of paradise. That is the dead man's daughter, Miss Daisy Malcomb. She was seen at the office, or going in that direction along the corridor, about nine o'clock last night. I have this from the janitor. He saw no other woman go that way, though that proves nothing. A dozen might have gone without him observing them. He confessed he did not know when Daisy left the office: so you see he was not as alert as he pretended to me to be."

"You had all this in reply to your questions?"

The puzzled look still remained.

There was an answer in the affirmative.

"May I ask you why you prefer to be assigned to the case? We have many good men—men who have shown their capabilities. You have your own particular field. Another would have to be sent to take your place!"

Chicago Charlie had thought the matter all out, during the ride in the cab, and was prepared with his reply. He was resolved to hold back nothing.

"It is very true. My reasons will be plain to you, when I say that Daisy Malcomb, the young lady who is likely to unjustly fall under suspicion, is my promised wife!"

The inspector was amazed, and showed it.

He did not immediately reply, but looked hard at the carpet, and chewed at a bit of match which he fished from a vest pocket.

Finally he spoke:

"Only that I know you so well, Mr. Clingstone, I should instantly tell you that your request is a most preposterous one. The worst possible man, ordinarily, to put on a case like this, would be the lover of the woman who is liable to be suspected. Naturally, he would desire to shield her, and would be tempted to suppress anything tending to show her guilt. Is not that a fair inference?"

The young officer could not evade so direct a thrust. He flushed but not in anger.

"It is!"

"You will understand how highly I regard you, then, when I say I will seriously consider your proposition. You are a man of your word. I say this, because I shall ask a promise of you."

"Name it!"

"Before even thinking seriously of this matter, I must have your pledged word of honor that if anything occurs to cause you to doubt the innocence of this young lady you will instantly report it to me."

"You have my promise!"

Chicago Charlie gave his word freely, for

he was sure nothing of the kind, more than had already been reported, could occur.

"Now," and the officer seemed to desire to turn from the subject, "What do you know of this Englishman, of whom you have spoken? Do you think he may have been an accomplice?"

"It is possible! I have formed no theory, yet. I know the fellow fairly well. He is a wealthy chap, not the brightest in the world, and is traveling about as fast a gait as any one of so sluggish a disposition can. His name is Selwyn Fisher, though he is usually called 'Walesey,' or 'The Prince,' which he much prefers to his own name.

"He claims to have been a big man in the tight little island beyond seas, and that he was once granted audience by the Prince of Wales. Hence the name was given him by his associates. He is a lover of fast horses, gambling, and all the other things that usually go with them. He spends his money like water, and drinks like a fish.

"He confessed that he was in Malcomb's office last night; though, in spite of the suspicion that might arise because of it, I don't think he has the nerve for such a deed. He trembled this morning at the bare suggestion. He is a man to run away as fast as his chubby legs would carry him;—not at all the man to wield a knife or pistol. Of course, that is only my opinion!"

"And your opinion is what I wanted."

Again the inspector chewed the cud of reflection, while the young officer sat uneasily before him.

When he looked up it was in a manner to show that the interview was at an end.

"You will be needed at the inquest, which will be held now in a few minutes. After I hear what there develops, I will consider your suggestion. Come again this evening, and you shall have my answer; and my reasons for it, should I decide against you!"

Chicago Charlie thanked him for this mark of favor, and sought a cab as soon as he was in the street, giving to the driver the number of John Malcomb's office.

Would the inquest develop anything new? The desire now nearest his heart seemed to rest its fulfillment on the result of the coroner's examination.

CHAPTER III.

SOME STARTLING EVIDENCE.

THE famous and mysterious Borden murder case was then attracting wide-spread attention; a case in which a young woman was charged with having slain her parents in the most cold-blooded manner. Column-long accounts of the trial were being paraded daily in the papers, and Chicago Charlie could not but recur to what he had read, as he hastened up the street leading to the Malcomb residence.

He knew how quick is the public to seize on anything suggestive or sensational, and the fear that suspicion might point its dark finger at Daisy Malcomb in that terrible way, filled him with the liveliest fears.

He was troubled, too, lest the inspector should refuse him his request. He knew that if another were detailed to take hold of this already baffling case, that one of the first things done would be the arrest of Daisy.

His pulses were bounding as he walked up the flagged path and rung the door-bell. A servant came, to whom Clingstone stated his desire to see the young lady of the house.

It was like receiving a blow in the face, when the servant, who knew him well, refused him entrance, saying that Miss Daisy had given strict orders that she was not to be disturbed.

"Then she knows of the—"

"She knows of the death of her father, yes, sir, if that is what you were going to say! News of it was brought to her some time ago. She is in her room, now, and absolutely refuses to see any one."

"Will you not mention my name to her? Perhaps she will—"

The servant, who was of the supercilious kind, drew back at this, and closed the door in Clingstone's face.

Charlie choked down his wrath and his great grief, and walked thoughtfully back to the street.

He found the coroner ready for business,

when he again sought the office. One or two unimportant witnesses had already been examined, and the janitor was now undergoing the process of telling all he knew, in response to innumerable questions.

The coroner scribbled something on a blank and gave it to an officer, when the janitor told of Daisy Malcomb's visit to the office, and Chicago Charlie groaningly recognized the disagreeable fact that she was to be summoned as a witness.

The body of John Malcomb had been removed, but the suggestive blood-stains were still visible.

Clingstone, sitting where he could accomplish it without much observation, pushed a rug across the blood-marks with his foot.

Selwyn Fisher, looking shakier and paler than ever, was next asked to make a formal statement of what he knew.

There was only one point in the Englishman's testimony that surprised the pained officer, and that may be given in Fisher's words:

"Yes, sir; I was 'ere him the office with John Malcomb last night, hand we 'ad a little game hof cards together; not for much money, you hunderstand, but just to pass haway the time, sir! And Malcomb finally got hangry with me, hand hordered me to leave the room!"

The coroner metaphorically pricked up his ears.

"How was that?"

"Well, you see, sir, Hi'd been ha bantering 'im habout that girl hof 'is, hand ha tellin' 'im that she was the prettiest female hin the city, sir; hand finally Hi hofferred to lay 'im a wager.

"Hi hofferred to play 'im twenty thousand dollars, sir, hagaint the 'and hof the girl! Hand 'e got mad bat that, sir, hand told me to leave the place, sir, hor 'e'd shoot my blawsted 'ead off! Hof course Hi couldn't stand *that* kind of talk from ha friend, don't you know, so I hups and takes my 'at hand leaves!"

Chicago Charlie wished at the moment that he might have his fingers around the throat of the Britisher, and the glare in his eyes would have been observable had any one been looking at him. All attention, however, was centered on the Englishman.

"And you two were alone in the office?"

"We were, sir!"

"About what time last evening was that?"

"Habout nine o'clock, sir; for when Hi got down honto the street, hit was two minutes hafter, has shown by my watch!"

The look of suspicion with which Chicago Charlie had before regarded Fisher deepened again in his eyes.

He was not allowed much time to reflect on the remarkable testimony of Fisher, when all eyes were directed to the door, and he beheld Daisy Malcomb enter, heavily veiled, and walking with an uncertain and quivering step. He saw that her form was convulsed by the agony she was silently enduring, and his great love made him wish that he might hurry to her assistance. But prudence held him in his seat.

If he was to have the management of this special detective work, he realized that he must be cautious how he permitted the public to see what was passing in his mind. He must not let his feelings sway him, for he knew not but that some detective officer was in the room, sent by the inspector for the purpose of watching his conduct during the trial.

Yet it was hard for him to permit another to place for Daisy Malcomb a chair and assist her to it.

The coroner, probably willing to spare her all he could, called her name immediately, and administered the usual oath.

Then came the customary questions, varied to suit each individual.

"You visited your father in his office last evening, did you not?" queried the coroner.

A number of seconds, during which she was evidently trying to obtain control of her voice, elapsed before she spoke—seconds that seemed interminably long to the breathless, listening crowd.

Many spectators had gathered, for the news of the murder had already been bruited abroad; spectators from every walk of life, almost, but chiefly belonging to the idle and half-vicious classes. And these

craned their necks and stared at the vail which hid from view the features of the trembling girl.

Chicago Charlie, with heart bleeding for her, wondered if any there thought of the Borden murder case, so strongly impressed at that moment on his mind; and, thus wondering, he prayed that, if such thoughts existed, they might not prejudice the public mind against her.

"I did not, sir!"

The silence became more profound, as these words fell from the lips of Daisy Malcomb.

Recalling the evidence given by the janitor, the coroner could scarcely credit his hearing.

So he framed the question anew:

"Were you not up there last evening?"

"Yes, sir; but I did not see my father!"

A deep sigh welled from the throng. The sensation was likely to be spoiled, after all!

"Who did you meet, if any one?"

"No one. I was up here, first, in the afternoon, when my father told me to return for him at eight. It was about nine, though, when I came, and he had already gone."

"And you saw no one?"

"No, sir!"

"You did not see that man over there?" indicating the Englishman.

She lifted her vail, showing a dark, handsome face, and glanced at Fisher, but still replied:

"I saw no one!"

Chicago Charlie could see that the exposed face was pained and drawn, as was to be expected.

"Nine o'clock, did you say?"

"Yes, sir. I looked at my watch, to see how much I was behind time, and it was three or four minutes before nine o'clock."

"And no one was in the office?"

"I think not. The office was dark, and I did not enter!"

Every one thought of the testimony given by the Englishman concerning the time, and several curious glances were bestowed on him.

After a few further questions, Daisy was permitted to depart.

Chicago Charlie did not attempt to follow, feeling sure he would be the next witness—as he was.

He told how Fisher had summoned him from the street; of what they had discovered, and going into the minutest details, at the coroner's request.

Again Fisher was called to the stand.

"Why did you wish to see John Malcomb this morning?" was the sharp inquiry.

The Englishman trembled.

"Because of that quarrel, sir, his hit may be called a quarrel. We had halways been the best of friends, and he couldn't bear that we should be enemies, at this late day!"

The explanation seemed sufficient.

Then a witness was called whose testimony was to startle Chicago Charlie out of what little composure he had left. This witness was the police officer he had summoned to take charge of the room during his absence.

He came forward and produced a bloody knife, which he held up for the coroner's inspection.

"You may state where you obtained that knife, Mr. Mangle!"

"Yes, sir. I found it lying in the corner over there, just before you reached the office; and when you came in you will remember that I showed it to you."

Chicago Charlie looked at the corner indicated, and saw that some papers were lying in it, under which the knife might have lain concealed. But he did not think it had thus escaped his notice, for he felt he had made a close search of the premises. The thought that it had been placed there since, for a purpose, came to him like a flash.

He looked again at the knife, which the coroner was passing around for the inspection of the jurymen; and a cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

He recognized the knife. It was a small knife, but with a long, slender and keen blade. *It was a knife he had given to Daisy Malcomb not a month before!*

He turned aside his face for fear some one would observe the anguish there depicted.

He had seen that the knife-blade and handle were smeared with blood. Had that knife taken the life of John Malcomb? He would not believe it. At least he refused to listen to the suggestion that the owner of the knife had dealt the fatal blow. That was too preposterous, too horrible, for belief. No one but an insane man would harbor it for a minute.

The terror that possessed him during the next few minutes can scarcely be realized. He felt that he ought, as an officer of the law, to tell what he knew concerning the weapon. Yet he shook, clinging almost blindly to his chair, in the great fear that he might be called up and asked some further questions.

He could not reveal *that!* It would be supreme folly, he thought, to give out that information, until he had made an investigation.

His feeling of gratitude was intense, when he observed he was not to be called. The policeman had turned the knife over to the coroner, and the jurymen were deliberating.

How he listened for the result of their discussion!

It came at last: A general verdict of murder, by some person or persons unknown.

Daisy was safe for the present; and the great work of Chicago Charlie's life had commenced; for he was resolved to run down this mystery, even if he had to resign his position to enable him to do it.

Henceforth, he was Chicago Charlie, the detective, and he was destined to prove he was not unworthy of that title.

CHAPTER IV.

"WHO WAS SHE?"

As soon as he felt at liberty to leave the room, Chicago Charlie slipped out, and hastened once more to the Malcomb residence.

It was a pleasantly-situated house, with neatly-kept walks and trees, and the sun that morning was flooding it with light. Yet there was about it an air of marked and suggestive stillness. The presence of death brooded there, which not even the flooding sunshine could drive away.

There was crape on the door, and a glance at the curtains of the windows of one of the lower rooms told that the body of John Malcomb was reposing within, robed for the grave. Chicago Charlie would have known this, without any such evidence, for the carriage of an undertaker was drawn up at the curb.

His pull at the bell was answered by the servant who had previously sent him away.

Resolved not to be balked this time, the young detective pushed past the man and into the house.

"You will take this card to Miss Daisy Malcomb!" he commanded, frowning at the man, who had followed. "I am sure she will see me! If not, tell her it is important!"

The man looked doubtfully at the card, hesitating as if he thought of refusing, then disappeared with it, leaving Chicago Charlie to await his return.

He was back, though, in a remarkably short time, and led the way to a little room on the second floor, where the detective found the girl, sitting disconsolately at a window, a servant having just left her side.

Taking this as a good omen, Chicago Charlie advanced unhesitatingly.

She arose, sobbingly, to greet him.

Without a word he drew her away from the window, and folded her in his arms, as if he would by that act shield her from all harm.

"My dear Daisy! How you must suffer! I came two hours or more ago, but you would not see me; and now I have come again. You will let me assist you? comfort you? do something for you?"

There was entreaty in the tones.

"I did not know you had called!" she asserted, a light flash of pleasure suffusing her pallid cheeks, where were many traces of tears. "I supposed the servant would admit you, even though I had given orders that I was not to be disturbed!"

His arms tightened about her. Then he conducted her to a chair and drew one close up at her side, kissing her as he did so.

She began to sob, showing all the bitterness of her fresh grief.

"It is terrible!" he confessed. "But you must endeavor to remain calm!"

"The manner of his death is what hurts so!" she averred, between the shaking sobs. "That my father should be killed in that cruel manner! It is dreadful! Dreadful! And he was so kind to me, and so good; and he loved me so! Oh! I don't know what I shall do! I feel at times as if I was losing my mind!"

The anguish on the young officer's face was painful to see. Yet, before this outburst of grief, he was silent. Words failed him. He knew not what to do or say;—realizing how weak and impotent are mere words at such a time.

"You must not distress yourself so!" he pleaded. "I know it is dreadful! But tears can do no good, now!"

He took her trembling hands in his, and was startled at their feverishness.

"You are making yourself ill!" he urged. "Perhaps you need a physician more than anything else. Your palms are burning hot!"

"No! No! I am not sick!"

But when she looked up, he observed that while her cheeks were pale, her eyes were feverishly bright.

"What did they learn at the—the trial?" she questioned.

It was the point to which he would have directed speech, had he known how.

"I wanted to talk to you about that!" he averred. "I think I will be assigned to look into this case, for I have resolved to ferret it out and find the—the murderer! I have already applied to the inspector for the assignment."

Her glance showed her gratitude.

"The man must be found and punished!" she declared, with unexpected sternness. "I can never rest until that is accomplished."

"Nor I!" his pulse quickening. "But the murderer was not a man. The crime was by a woman!"

"By a woman?"

Her voice shook with horror.

"Surely you must be mistaken! That seems incredible! No woman could be guilty of such a thing!"

"I have good reasons for thinking otherwise!" and he clasped the hands yet more firmly. "I distinctly saw a woman's tracks in the dust on the floor, and the print of a woman's fingers on the table at which your father must have been sitting when the fatal blow was given. I am sure the murderer was a woman. You say you were not in the office last night; those tracks and marks were made last night; and some woman made them. If I could lay my hands on her, I am sure I should have the guilty one!"

She shuddered, involuntarily.

Chicago Charlie was thinking of the knife, but he thought it best to withhold that information for the time.

"How can you tell when the marks were made?" she queried, her curiosity quickened.

"By their general appearance! If very old—much more than twelve hours old—they would not have been so distinct. Yet they were not sufficiently fresh and clear to have been made this morning. It is not likely any one would venture on a deed of that kind in broad daylight. Therefore, they must have been made last night!"

He looked at her thoughtfully for a moment.

"What I wanted to ask you, is this: Has any strange woman called on you lately, or been in the house?"

She started as if stung.

"Why, it could not be! Yes, a woman was here last evening! Her coming was what kept me from visiting the office promptly, as I promised father I would!"

Chicago Charlie's breath came quick and fast, like that of a hound scenting a trail.

"Who was that woman?"

"I cannot tell you who she was! She was dark—very dark—and wore a heavy vail. Her eyes were as black as night, and so was her hair. She wanted me to let her tell my fortune, and—I foolishly consented. You do not think that she—that that could have brought about—that my delay here could have caused father's death?"

Her eyes were filled with remorse and horror.

Even faster came the detective's breath

and louder thumped his heart. Here was information worth having! He felt sure that this dark-eyed fortune-teller had not come there simply to tell fortunes. She had come to get a weapon with which to commit that foul crime;—a weapon from Malcomb's own house, so that the crime might be laid at the door of another! At the door of Malcomb's daughter! The mystery of the Borden murder had evidently not only suggested itself to him; it had suggested itself to this murderess, who had acted on it.

In vain he sought to recall the face of some well-known adventuress or desperate woman who might have committed the crime.

"Describe her minutely!" he requested.

"I do not know that I can, any more than I have already."

"Was she young or old?"

"Young! I should say not more than twenty. Surely a girl of that age could not do that!"

"Handsome?"

"Rather pretty. Her cheeks and lips were red and plump, and she had a good form."

"How was she dressed?"

"In an ordinary dark dress. I did not notice her clothing closely, for she had on a dark shawl."

"I will find her," he declared, "if she remains in the city! And I don't think she can escape me, even should she leave. She is the woman that killed your father. I feel sure of it!"

Having obtained this information, he was anxious to hurry at once with it to the inspector. The description tallied with the footprints and marks found in the office, and he did not doubt that the inspector would see that this was the murderess, and not Malcomb's daughter. It explained everything. The finding of the bloody knife, and all. Yet he could not refrain from secretly cursing himself for overlooking so important a thing in his search as that knife!

Notwithstanding his desire to hasten away, he lingered for many long minutes, and had the satisfaction, as he left the residence, of knowing that Miss Daisy Malcomb was in much better frame of mind than when he came. And, most important of all, he had gained the clue needed to begin his work.

CHAPTER V.

A REMARKABLE FORTUNE-TELLER.

WITH a feeling that was not quite reluctance, yet was akin to it, Daisy Malcomb walked out through the shaded path, leading from her home into the street.

Three days had elapsed;—days that had been filled with grief. And, though the sunshine fell as pleasantly on this day as on that other when Chicago Charlie had pushed past the servant into the house, the shadow which then hung over the residence had not departed. Nor would it for many, many days to come.

The last sad services to the dead had been rendered, and the murdered man was now sleeping in Chicago's beautiful city of the dead;—sleeping quite as quietly there as if he had died in the ordinary manner and with the ordinary surroundings.

The papers had teemed with exaggerated accounts of the tragedy, and the many theories they put forth were certainly remarkable for ingenuity. Yet the detective, reading all of them carefully, felt sure none of them hit anywhere near the mark.

Chicago Charlie had been assigned to the difficult task of laying bare the mystery of the murder, the task he had so desired and so earnestly solicited. And it was at his earnest request that Daisy Malcomb was now setting forth on an errand that possessed all the characteristics of novelty.

Seemingly all the world had come up to Chicago to see the great Fair; and if not to see the Fair, then to profit by those who had come for that purpose. And of the latter class there were so many that the great lake-side city fairly swarmed.

Among others, was a band of Gypsies, who had pitched their camp on some vacant lots near the grounds of the Columbian Exposition, and within easy reach of it. They had been compelled to pay pretty dearly for the privilege, a thing to which they were much

averse, but they probably reasoned that the golden harvest they would reap in consequence would more than justify this extravagance.

Chicago Charlie, in his search for the dark-eyed fortune-teller, had located these Gypsies, and had gone among them in various disguises; and, though he saw many young Gypsy women, he could not say that any of them fully answered the description of the young fortune-teller who had visited Daisy Malcomb on the night of the murder.

Hence, he desired that Daisy herself should go to the Gypsy camp, and personally inspect the young women there, in the hope that she might be able to identify the one sought.

The fact that the woman who had called on Daisy that night had been dark, and professedly a fortune-teller, made him think she might be found among this band of roving Romanies.

As shown in the interview between the lovers, Daisy Malcomb was quite as anxious as Chicago Charlie to have the murderess ferreted out and brought to justice. She had never seen the knife that Mangle had exhibited at the inquest; and, though it was now in possession of her lover, the latter never mentioned it to her. What she had seen in the papers concerning it, gave her no suspicion that the knife there spoken of was the one which had once been her own.

Even though thus anxious to bring the guilty one to justice, Daisy had not been able as yet to convince herself that the deed had been committed by a woman, though she thought it possible a woman might have had knowledge of it, and might even have abetted it. But that woman's hand had driven the weapon she would not believe, for the paths which her feet had followed had never brought her in contact with a creature bearing the semblance of a woman who could be so hardened as to strike that murderous blow.

However, at the bidding of her lover, she had put aside her grief for a time; put aside her shrinking weakness; put aside the thought that her act, under the circumstances, might be unbecoming; and, taking an Elevated train, was soon whirling in the direction of Jackson Park.

She separated herself from the vast crowds that were pouring toward the gates opening on the great show, on alighting; and, turning into a side street, hurried quickly on toward the Gypsy camp, anxious to escape the public gaze, and fearful lest she should be recognized.

Her heart gave a weakening, tremulous bound, when the dirty white tents of the Gypsies loomed on her vision; but she went on, nevertheless, and was soon near enough to observe the lounging forms of two or three unwholesome-looking, Gypsy men, who appeared to have nothing particular to do in this world, save to lie idly on the grass, smoke stinking black pipes, and stare at the sky.

The music of the cowboy band floated to her from Buffalo Bill's mammoth "Wild West" exhibition, the notes drowned occasionally by the rumble and grumble of heavily-laden trains.

The Gypsy men scarcely looked at her as she walked past them and toward the nearest tent. There were only three or four women to be seen, but two of these could be called young. Neither of them was the fortune-teller who had called on her.

Entering the tent, or rather hesitating in the entrance, she saw before her a withered crone, with skin like brown leather, who came promptly forward, and, in a wheedling voice, desired her to come in.

Daisy accepted this invitation, though the rough chair offered was not of the cleanest.

"Now, what can I do for you, my dear?" the woman asked. "I see you have come to get your fortune told. It ought to be a good fortune, for you're a purty girl. And you've a handsome lover, too, I don't doubt. I'm Gypsy Nell, and I've told fortunes—true fortunes—since I was that high!" indicating a distance of two feet from the ground.

There was something so keen and bright in this old woman's eyes, that Daisy almost shrunk from her. The crone's glance seemed to pierce her through and through, as if seeking out her innermost secrets.

"Are there no other women here?" Daisy palpitantly asked.

Gypsy Nell frowned slightly.

"Only those girls out there. They can't tell fortunes, though they pretend that they can. Let me tell your fortune, lady!"

She took Daisy's hand and peered at it, wrinkling her brows as if in thought. The girl did not draw her hand away, for there was in the old woman's manner something commanding and imperious.

"You are a good girl, as I said—a good girl; but, ah! I cannot speak so well of your father. He was a hard man; hard on the poor. Yes, and he was a gambler, a speculator, and what these Americans call a wrecker!"

Daisy would have drawn the hand away, now, only that the old crone detained it.

"You must not speak that way of my father!" the girl panted, unable to restrain her indignant tears.

"Yes, I know. He is dead! And your grief is yet strong. Let me see! There is a bloody shadow on the hand. Just there! Do you not see it?"

"Your father did not die as he should have died. He was murdered. Ay! I see, now. He was stabbed or cut, and so died. It is hard, lady! Very hard! Pardon me, for giving you pain. I will tell no more, if it thus distresses you."

Daisy was not only astonished by what she had heard, but her curiosity was piqued by the woman's accent. She had expected to hear something foreign. Yet this Gypsy woman spoke English almost as well as she herself spoke it. Whereas, the woman who had visited her that fatal night, spoke it very poorly.

Daisy, having heard this much of the so-called "fortune," was extremely anxious that the Gypsy woman should go on, and so expressed herself.

"Very well, lady! But if I say things to make you feel bad, you must not be angry as awhile ago. It is my business to tell what I see, not what people would like to have me tell them. What good is a fortune, if we do not speak true?"

"Do you mean to say that you see all those things in the palm of my hand?" Daisy demanded, incredulously.

"I see shadows and lines in the hand; and when I see them, I cannot tell you how, but their meaning comes up before me. As you see things, lady, when you read a book. You are educated and can read the book, which to me would be only crazy dots and figures. Yet it tells you what is there put down. So, in this fortune telling business. You read the book, and I read the hand!"

"Go on!" said the girl, resigning herself without further question. "What else can you see there?"

"The bloody cloud has got clearer and I see figures of people moving about in it. There is a man who I'm certain is your father."

"How do I know?" as if to ward off another inquiry. "I cannot tell how I know; only I feel it to be so. He is in a small room—a room that has books and papers in it. A light is turned low on the table. It may be he is asleep, for his head is bent down on his arm."

A twinge of pain shot through Daisy's heart. Had her father fallen asleep while waiting for her and been thus murdered?

"Ah!" and the old woman drew in her breath eagerly. "A man has come into the room. He has crept in through the door. He has a knife. He looks at the man by the table. He creeps forward as a cat. He strikes. He stabs the man in the back!"

Her voice had grown to a low and impressive whisper. Daisy snatched away the hand with a little shriek. So vividly had the picture been painted, and in so dramatic a manner, that she could almost fancy she had seen what had been described.

The crone had looked at her compassionately, even tenderly.

"It was terrible, lady! Was it not?"

Daisy's lips were white and mute, and the pupils of her eyes dilated with the excitement.

"Tell the rest of it!" she resolutely ordered, thrusting the palm once more into the skinny grasp. "Tell me all you see! Everything!"

"Are you sure it was a man who struck the blow?"

For the time a thoroughly superstitious feeling had possession of her, and she could not rid herself of the belief that this old, witch-like creature had some magical power by which events of the past were revealed.

"You are sure it was a man?" shakily.

"Quite sure, my dear!" and the Gypsy stared at her in amazement.

"The man is gone now and the room is dark, and the other man—your father—lies on his back on the floor!"

She had turned again to an inspection of the palm, but she continued to cast on Daisy those questioning glances, which, could Daisy have observed them, would have been the source of much conjecture.

"What kind of a man was he?" Daisy urged. "How did he look?"

The detective instinct, that was so strong a trait in the character of her lover, was being aroused in her.

"A heavy-faced man. A man of much size. A beer drinker, with a chuffy, puffy face."

Daisy recognized the description immediately as that of Selwyn Fisher. She remembered him as she sat in the room at the time of the inquest, and Chicago Charlie had described him minutely more than once since.

"His name?" she panted.

"I cannot tell his name. There is nothing about a man to tell you what his name may be. I can only tell how he looks!"

"Go on!"

"I cannot tell more about that! The bloody cloud is past. Now a lighter cloud overspreads your hand, beginning here. That is the region of the heart, my dear; so I know that what I shall see now will be of your lover."

Daisy sat spell-bound under the old woman's influence.

"A tall, handsome young man, my dear. A policeman, I think, by his uniform."

Wonder trod on the heels of wonder. Daisy could scarcely credit her ears. What remarkable power did not this old woman possess?

"He is chasing the fat man; and he is sure to catch him, for the fat man cannot run so fast. He has found out that the fat man killed the man in the room, and for your sake he is trying to catch him. Ah! he has him now. He drags him down, and then pulls him away with him."

"There is a lighter cloud; a cloud with rosy edges. It is what we call the wedding cloud, my dear. The darkness of the past is gone. I see you standing up in a great church with the young man, and the preacher is blessing you. It is a good fortune, for it ends well!"

She dropped the hand, as if to indicate that she was done, and Daisy looked up at her as if coming out of a trance. What she had heard seemed to the girl parts of a dream, though she knew she had not been dreaming.

"And that is all?"

"Is it not enough? Is it not worth the fee? Who could have a better fortune for fifty cents?"

She laughed in a harsh, disagreeable way, that grated on the girl's over-strung nerves.

"It is enough! If I could only believe it all!"

The old woman frowned, as she had once done at the beginning.

"Believing it or not believing it, does not make it true or untrue. It was written in your hand. I have learned never to doubt what I see there."

Daisy took the fee from her purse, and passed it over.

"Thank you," and the crone courtesied. "Not many get so good a fortune for the money. Not many hands show so happy a future. You have a good face, and I hope that all your dreams may come true."

"I had my dreams, once. Ah! well. That was long ago. I have quit dreaming, except for other people, who pay me for it. But dreams are good for a girl."

She courtesied again and turned away, leaving Daisy alone in the shabby tent.

Daisy looked at her watch, and was surprised that so much time had elapsed. She had been there more than an hour, and it had scarcely seemed five minutes. There

were voices about her, which she had not before heard. She saw that a number of Gypsies had returned, and that there were several girls among them.

She scanned these closely, noting their features, dress, and manners. None of them suggested the dark-faced woman who had called on her on that ever-to-be-remembered night. They were different in many ways. Some of them were as dark, and had eyes and hair as black, but their manners and speech were of a different order.

The faces were all strange, and when she had satisfied herself that the woman she had come seeking was not of the number, she left the tent and walked back toward the crowded streets, her mind filled with the wonderful things that had dropped from the lips of the old woman.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DANCING GIRL FROM CAIRO.

"THERE is information of importance back of that!" Chicago Charlie exclaimed, when he heard Daisy's account of the result of her visit to the Gypsy camp. "That old woman knows a good deal more than she told; we have struck the main trail!"

He leaned toward the girl, and his earnestness betrayed itself in his quick speech.

It was the evening of the same day, and he had called on Daisy Malcomb to receive her report, and for the further reason that he was always glad of an excuse to court her presence.

Chicago Charlie was rapidly getting his plans in order, and they were, he felt, sufficiently broad and comprehensive to accomplish the desired result: i. e., the capture of the murderer of John Malcomb. A capable shadower had been put on the track of the Englishman, Walsey, and certain interesting facts had already been discovered concerning him.

"What sort of information?" Daisy asked.

"Well, I think it's safe to assume that that old woman knows a great deal more than she told you. Of course, she has no such ability to read the future and pry into secrets as she claims."

"Of course!" Daisy assented, though she could not quite rid herself of the feeling that the crone was really gifted with prophetic power.

She had held back from her lover the account of the policeman, and the future predicted for him; all excepting that portion relating to his chase of the fat murderer.

Even as he spoke, Chicago Charlie was doing some rapid thinking. He was endeavoring to account for the knowledge which the Gypsy appeared to possess.

"These Gypsies have been about town a good deal lately," he said at length, "begging, and probably stealing. This fortune-teller may even have visited this house. All the world knows of the crime against your father, for it has been published broadcast. Does it not seem likely that she may have seen you here, or that you may have been pointed out to her somewhere? Knowing who you were and recognizing you when you came to the camp, with the knowledge which she could have gained from the papers, it is easy to see how she could fabricate the story told you."

"Taking this view of it, makes it seem reasonable and probable. Either that, or she possesses some knowledge of what has really been done—perhaps knows who committed the deed—and thought to astonish you by saying what she did. Even then, she must have seen you before to have so recognized you."

The explanation was clear and sensible, and yet it did not drive from Daisy the queer thrill that had oppressed her as she listened breathlessly to the words of the crone. It dashed aside what had seemed so miraculous, and the miraculousness of the performance was what she was most disposed to cling to. And yet Daisy Malcomb would solemnly have assured her friends and herself that she was not the least bit superstitious. Probably there is a drop of superstitious blood in the best of us, if we did but acknowledge it. Which is not to be wondered at, when we recall how short is the time since the age of witch-burning.

The spirit of old Cotton Mather is not yet dead.

Daisy, fearing ridicule, did not essay to put her feelings into words; and Chicago Charlie went on:

"I shall have the Gypsy camp shadowed, and something may develop. At the same time, I do not intend to give my personal attention to it. There is other work for me just now, and for you, too."

He anticipated the glance of surprise with which this was greeted.

"Will you explain yourself, Charlie Clingstone!" she demanded, vexed at the silence that ensued.

"I have been looking everywhere for the fortune-teller that called on you that night, as you know. I half-believe, too, that I have located her. She is in one of the buildings about the Cairo street, in Midway Plaisance."

Daisy knew the place. It was one of the special exhibits at the World's Fair, on the mile-long thoroughfare known as Midway Plaisance containing the pay exhibits and concessions.

She drew in her breath quick and hard. She had already visited the Cairo street—having been there earlier, in the season, before the buildings were completed—and she recollected now that there was a marked resemblance in some of the faces seen there to that of the woman who had called on her.

"Can you go with me to-morrow?" he queried, watching the shadows chase each other over her expressive features.

"I will arrange to do so, if you specially wish it."

"Thank you. I especially wish it, or I should not have asked it of you. Now as to this Englishman, Selwyn Fisher, for the Gypsy could have meant no one else. I hardly think he is the man to watch, though I shall have some one constantly on his track. I don't believe that a man did the deed. I think it was a woman, in spite of the assertions of the old fortune-teller."

Much more was said, which it is not the present purpose of this story to record.

The next day, Chicago Charlie and Daisy Malcomb pressed with the crowd through one of the turnstiles into the big Fair.

Before and about them lay the wonderful "White City." A poet's dream wrought into towering palaces and artistic forms. A vision of rich magnificence standing with marble feet in the waters of the Michigan Lake.

But they felt that they had no time just then to devote to its wonders and beauties, and so they turned aside and entered Midway Plaisance; where the glancing sunbeams fell on queer buildings of foreign construction, on Javanese, Dahoman and Irish villages—and where the odd music of a Chinese band brought back to Chicago Charlie memories of the time when he was a ragged urchin and vigorously led a procession of other boys battering away at old tin pans with sticks.

Entering Cairo street—seemingly a section carved out of the heart of old Cairo—where Egyptian hieroglyphics looked down from the walls and solemn sphinxes guarded the mysteries hidden away in the depths of the buildings, they sought the spot where the Ghawazees, or dancing girls, were accustomed daily to give exhibitions of their dancing in the far-off Orient.

Two girls, fairly comely in features, with rich red lips, were swaying sensuously in the center of the floor, the dance being more a swaying of the body and limbs than anything like the dances Americans are accustomed to.

Chicago Charlie's eyes were on Daisy Malcomb, more than on the voluptuous figures of the dancers, for one of these swaying women he had picked on as resembling the one who had visited Daisy on that fatal night.

He saw Daisy turn pale, felt her clutch tighten on his arm, and knew she had recognized the dancing girl.

Fearing the recognition might be mutual, if Daisy's agitation attracted attention, he drew his sweetheart away, passing out as if in search of other attractions.

"It is she!" Daisy whispered, in much agitation, and with blanching lips. "That is the girl who called on me to tell me my fortune!"

"And it is the girl who took the knife, and who committed the murder!" was the detective's inward comment.

Aloud he only said:

"I thought so. I felt I could not be mistaken, for your description was very minute. Now we will go in here to rest awhile, for you seem about to drop. I was afraid your face would betray you, when you saw her."

Daisy was almost too weak to stand, so suffered herself to be led into a neighboring *cafe*, where refreshments and a cup of stimulating coffee were ordered for her by the detective.

CHAPTER VII.

A BIT OF SHADOWING.

In an obscure corner, where the light did not fall so blindingly and where the tinkling accompaniment to the Ghawazee dance came with melodious softness, sat Chicago Charlie, with his hat well drawn over his eyes, and peering out keenly from half-closed lids.

His gaze was riveted on the dancing girls, and he was especially watching the movements of the one who had been recognized that morning by Daisy Malcomb as the nocturnal fortune-teller.

It was the evening of the same day, and he had returned to the Cairo building to make a study of the girl.

If this dancing girl were the murderess, what had been her motive? Why did she do the horrible deed?

This was the question to whose solution Chicago Charlie was devoting his thoughts.

He was well aware that the Ghawazees had been in the country only a few months, and it seemed impossible that this girl could have formed the acquaintance of John Malcomb in that time, housed as she had been from the gaze of the public. It was not likely, therefore, that the girl could have held against him, personally, any animosity. And robbery had not been the motive for the commission of the crime, for there had apparently been no valuables taken.

Shrewd as was the young detective he found himself at fault and sorely puzzled.

There seemed but one solution of the mystery: This girl—taking it for granted that she had slain John Malcomb—had not done it through enmity, nor through a desire to rob, but because she had been well paid for the deed by some one who was interested in putting Malcomb out of the way.

Who was this person?

The detective's thoughts reverted to the Englishman, against whom his suspicion had first been aroused. Yet, by putting together all the facts known of the Englishman's career, there was little enough to indicate that Selwyn Fisher had had reason for such a murderous desire.

Fisher and Malcomb had been friends or acquaintances, but not cronies. There was much to show that Malcomb had pushed the acquaintance, for the purpose of handling some of the money which Fisher now and then threw around so recklessly. The Englishman had come to this country fabulously rich, as it was said, the report adding that he had obtained his wealth through inheritance.

About the Englishman, as flies about a keg of sweets, a number of parasites had gathered. They were principally sporting men; men belonging to the "fastest" set of Chicago. John Malcomb did not exactly belong to this set, but he had been on intimate and sympathetic terms with many of the fellows who were reported to be "bleeding" the thick-headed Englishman.

The detective's ruminations were leading him far from the posturing of the dancing girls, when he was brought back to things present by the actions of a man who had recently entered the room.

This man was stylishly clad, and there was something in his general appearance which caused Chicago Charlie to set him down instantly as a confidence-man and a *roue*. His necktie was of the whitest, his hat of the shiniest, and his clothing of the most elegant fit. Now and then he cast an amorous glance at the girls, and clapped his gloved hands vigorously whenever the performance especially pleased him.

"I think I have seen that fellow," Chicago Charlie muttered, eying the man still more closely. "If I am not mistaken, his name is

Youngblood. Colonel Solon Youngblood! I think I saw him at the races last summer with Walesey, when they were backing that little black mare against Thunderbolt! They lost, too, if I'm not mistaken. Yes, it's the same fellow. He is one of Walesey's chums, and by that token I suppose he must have been an acquaintance of Malcomb's."

This knowledge that Daisy's father had herded so often with men of questionable character frequently stung him, as it did now.

The dancing came to an end at last; and, when the crowd began to thin out, one of the girls picked up a buttonaire, and, advancing to the swell-looking man, pinned it on the lapel of his coat.

"That is worth a quarter!" he heard her simper, ogling the man slyly. "Don't you think it worth that much?"

Then, as the man stooped slightly to get at his purse, she bent forward and quickly whispered something in his ear.

The man started, but regaining his composure, took out the quarter and handed it to her, and began to praise the flowers and the beauty of her dancing.

Chicago Charlie saw it all, and was aroused to instant alertness.

What acquaintance had this Ghawazee with Solon Youngblood? Had she whispered a warning of some sort into the ear of the sport and gambler? If so, did it concern him—Chicago Charlie? Had she, then, recognized Daisy Malcomb that morning, and known the detective when he again sought the building?

These wild fancies, flying quickly through his mind, seemed preposterous. Nevertheless, Chicago Charlie was so wrought upon by them that he resolved to shadow the man, when the latter should leave the building, and see what would result therefrom.

Youngblood did not remain in the building a great while after that. Most of those who had been interested in the dances had gone, and Youngblood followed them.

Chicago Charlie also got up from his corner and strolled out.

He caught a glimpse of Youngblood, as the latter turned into Midway Plaisance, and proceeded to dog his steps, as the sport walked slowly down the thoroughfare.

Youngblood took a car of the Illinois Central back to the city, and the detective climbed into the coach just back of the one occupied by the sport.

As the trains were crowded, it was not difficult to do this without attracting Youngblood's attention.

Every now and then the sport glanced keenly into the faces of the passengers about him, as the train rattled swiftly on its way toward the city, but evidently not seeing the one for whom he appeared to be looking, he abandoned these furtive surveys after a time.

He got off on State street, and walked west toward the river.

Probably fearing he was being followed, he halted, after walking a block or two, and took a horse car.

The delay gave the detective time to make some changes in his appearance. He had long before abandoned his policeman's uniform, as being unfitted to the character of the work he expected to do, and wore now an ordinary business suit.

He stepped into a corner, where the shadows from a stone stairway fell protectingly; and, turning his coat wrong-side out and adding to his face a set of chin whiskers and a pair of glasses, he emerged and walked on again, resolved to take the car that Youngblood was manifestly waiting for.

The turned coat—having been made with a lining of black coat cloth, so that it was really a black coat, instead of a light one, when it was turned—made the disguise complete.

Taking the opposite side of the street, he stopped at the crossing; and, when the car came along, he climbed into the seat within touch of Youngblood.

The detective did not know that Youngblood was fearful of being followed, though the indications pointed that way. Neither was there anything to show that the sport fancied the detective might pursue him. In truth, Chicago Charlie felt pretty sure that he had not been seen by Youngblood, while they were in the Cairo building.

Notwithstanding all this, he was fully as

careful as if certain the sport knew himself to be shadowed.

That these precautions had not been taken without good cause, the events of the night were destined to prove.

On one of the side streets leading off from Adams, in what might appropriately be termed the Bowery of Chicago, stands a rickety, old building, several stories high which has long had an evil reputation.

Youngblood, having dropped off the car at the junction, approached and entered the building by a side entrance—the shadower not far away.

No lights shone from it, which was a suspicious thing in itself. Neither was there any indication that it was occupied. It seemed to have been given over to neglect and decay.

Stationing himself on a corner beneath a stunted tree, Chicago Charlie closely watched this building for a number of minutes. Nothing came of it. The house remained as dark, as forbidding, and apparently as untenanted as before.

He crossed the street, avoiding as much as possible the glare of the electric lights, and, when he felt again safe from observation, drew near and circled the old house. He could not go entirely around it, for on the southern side it was joined to the other buildings, and some of these were occupied.

However, after considerable search and much stumbling, the shadower found a rear door. It was securely locked, but a window near it he succeeded in forcing, and thus gained access to the lower part of the house.

There was a dust-coated stairway leading into the mysterious upper regions; and this stairway Chicago Charlie at once ascended, stepping with the lightness of a cat, lest the timbers and boards should creak or give forth some sound of warning.

He spent almost a half-hour in searching the second and third floors, without finding anything to reward him, and might have continued the useless search for a much longer time, had not the sound of a softly-closing door caught his ear.

It came from below; and feeling sure, now, that the man he had been shadowing was not to be found above, he hastened to descend.

He again heard the sound, when near the foot of the first stairway, and caught a gleam of light as it fell through the entrance from the street.

The detective drew back, for the form of a man was dimly revealed.

This man closed the door after him and stepped away into the gloom.

What little he had seen of the man's general appearance convinced Chicago Charlie that the fellow was not Youngblood, and with his interest now whetted to renewed eagerness he moved stealthily after.

Contrary to his anticipations the man did not ascend toward the upper rooms, but went downward—thus showing that there was a stairway leading to a basement or cellar.

It was a most perilous thing to do, for another might enter the room at any minute, but Chicago Charlie slipped to this descending stairway and, after intently hearkening, noiselessly descended.

A gleam of light came to him, proving that the way led to an illuminated underground apartment. And he heard voices, too, as he proceeded onward.

On reaching the bottom of the stairway, he perceived that it would be impossible to enter this apartment without discovery. A half-dozen men were grouped about a table in the further end of the room, on which a light was burning. All were heavily masked. And though detached words and sentences floated to him now and then with much distinctness, he could recognize no voice but Youngblood's.

From what he heard, it was plain others were expected; and, not wishing to be caught between two fires, he cast about for a hiding-place.

The only one that offered was the dark corner between the wall and the half-open door. It was not the sort of hiding-place Chicago Charlie would have chosen, but it was the best to be had, and he slipped into it—just in time, too, for there were voices in the room above, and the sound of a footstep came from the head of the stairs.

Crouching in breathless suspense behind the door, with every nerve strained to its fullest, resolved and ready to fight or fly as occasion demanded, the young detective waited the descent of the new-comers.

The light coming from the basement aided in screening him, for it illuminated the stairway, thus throwing the corner into still deeper gloom; and the men passed by without dreaming that any one was thus near.

A sense of relief came to the daring shadower when this ordeal was ended; and he was shifting about in his place of concealment, seeking a point where he might see as well as hear; when the door closed from within, leaving him crouching there without any concealment save the intense gloom that instantly prevailed.

He sought the keyhole, however, and kneeling on the damp stones applied an eye to the small aperture, and looked into the basement.

Youngblood, who had arisen, was rapping for order.

He did not speak until attention had been fully accorded him.

Then he said, very quietly and firmly:

"The Lakeside League will now come to order. Sergeant-at-arms, satisfy yourself that the stairway and building are clear, and that all present are entitled to remain!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAKESIDE LEAGUE.

CHICAGO CHARLIE, seeing that this order was to be executed with considerable literalness, scudded up the stairway like a rat in a trap.

The sergeant-at-arms followed swiftly, peering into the gloom around the head of the stairway, and then walking on toward the entrance. But, he did not see the detective, who was standing within less than ten steps, securely screened by the thick shadows.

No doubt the sergeant-at-arms had thus obeyed the order of his chief many times, and had become careless through a feeling of safety. At any rate he came back in a few seconds; and, returning to the basement, reported that all was as it should be.

Chicago Charlie heard the report, for his eye was again at the keyhole and his gaze sweeping the interior of the underground room.

He was much puzzled by what he saw and heard. The city was filled with secret orders and lodges of all kinds, wherein mysterious rites and ceremonies were nightly performed. Men who were only plain clerks and artisans in the prosaic walks of common life, became in these organizations Grand Key-Holders of the Inner Temple and Sir Knights of the Ancient Order of Homo.

Chicago Charlie, in his many-sided studies of human nature, had often remarked how prone are men to rush into societies of this character; and so, when one of the men in the basement arose and respectfully addressed the chief as "Liege and Loyal Lord of the Lakeside Leaguers," he was more than half convinced that the meeting was only the gathering of an ordinary lodge.

Nevertheless, having gone so far, he was resolved to see the thing to the end, not knowing what might result. The fact that the men were masked amounted to nothing, for masking in these secret lodges he knew was not uncommon.

The one fact remained, that Colonel Solon Youngblood and the men who usually associated with him were ordinarily not the kind of men to seek out such a place for a meeting, if the meeting was to be only an ordinary one.

What the men said was of no moment, though it brought from Youngblood an explanatory reply that rooted and fixed the detective to the floor:

"This meeting has been called, brother Leaguers, to seriously consider our position. We are menaced by a new peril. For a number of months, now, we have gone on without danger and without interference from the police, and I need not tell you that we have been making money. Recently, however, a number of our men have been shadowed. I was myself watched to-night, and I think followed!"

He then went on to detail how he had been warned by the Ghawazee to be on the lookout for a man who had been at the time staring at him in the Cairo building.

"You cannot guess who that man is, for he has but recently taken up special detective work. He is becoming known as Chicago Charlie, the Columbian Detective, and he is likely to prove a dangerous enemy. I can hardly fancy what put him on our scent, but he is after us, hot and heavy, and each man of you must be constantly on his guard."

There was nothing said by Youngblood relating to the murder of John Malcomb, nor of how he had become acquainted with the dancing girl of the Cairo street. Nothing to show that this band had ever heard of John Malcomb!

One of the men rose to a question:

"When is that next cargo of stuff expected in?"

Chicago Charlie could not hear all that was said, but this seemed to be followed by some talk of stolen goods, of diamonds and laces and expensive merchandise.

When he saw that the meeting was about to break up—and it lasted less than an hour—Chicago Charlie hastily regained the streets, and stood there awaiting the coming forth of the men. They emerged one by one, and quietly dropped away in different directions to avoid observation.

When Youngblood appeared, Charlie followed him as before; and was not a little surprised when, at a neighboring corner, the sport crook encountered Selwyn Fisher, as if by appointment!

They took a horse car to the business part of the city; and then an Elevated Railway train for the World's Fair.

The detective was somewhat astonished at this course of procedure, remembering that Solon Youngblood had come from there so short a time before; but that he stuck close to them, with the tenacity of a bloodhound, may be taken for granted.

Once within the Exposition, the two turned into Midway Plaisance and sought out the big German beer garden, where they lounged and talked, and sipped the beer that had been ordered, while they listened to the music furnished by the excellent German band.

The beer garden was crowded, principally by Germans, who were chattering away with all their national vivacity; and Chicago Charlie, relying on the security of his disguise, took a seat at a table near that occupied by Youngblood and Fisher, and also called for a mug of beer.

He was pleased to note that they had no suspicion of his identity, and were therefore not on guard against him.

He slipped along the seat as far as he could without attracting their attention and listened closely to what they were saying.

It was even of more interest than that he had heard in the basement of the old building, for it concerned John Malcomb.

"There can't be any doubt that the officers have you spotted, Walesey, though I am glad to say we have been able so far to keep them traveling on the wrong scent!"

Walesey gave him a look of gratitude, though his fat cheeks shook with the terror which possessed him.

"It was a deuced unfortunate thing that you happened to be playing cards with Malcomb in his room that night! But for that, no one would have thought of you. And then, you see, you foolishly volunteered that story about the offer to bet and the quarrel, and told how Malcomb flew into a huffy rage and ordered you out of the room."

"Hi was ha fool!" Fisher groaned, sinking back into his chair and gulping down great quantities of the beer. "Hi guess Hi haven't sense enough to keep my head out of danger!"

"You ought to congratulate yourself, then, that you have friends to look out for you! I was just going to tell you how I disposed of that last fellow. He fancied he had got together enough facts to warrant your arrest, and he came up to my room looking for you."

"See here!" I said, "Walesey don't know any more about who killed John Malcomb than you do, and that is precious little. You think you've got facts, though you haven't;

but I suppose you'll go right on and arrest the poor devil, anyway?"

"Well, he said that was his intention, and nothing I could say would cause him to abandon it."

"Finally I says:

"Look here, now! What will it be worth to you to drop this thing? Fisher is an innocent man! If money's any object to you, perhaps we can arrange for you to let up on him, and turn your talents in another direction. Come, I say, 'what will it be worth to you?'"

"Well, the upshot of it was that I bought him off for a thousand dollars; and, as I couldn't find you at the time, I took it out of my own pocket."

"Hi don't know 'ow Hi can hever thank you enough for that!" Fisher declared, his tones and manner showing that the huge draughts of beer he had been pouring into his capacious stomach were beginning to affect his head.

He put his hand into a pocket and pulled out a check book.

"Not at all! Not at all!" Youngblood urged, with an impatient gesture. "Don't you suppose I can do that much for a friend? Keep your money! What is a thousand dollars?"

"But, I don't propose to 'ave you go paying hout your good money for me, that way, don't you see!" Fisher protested, laying the check book on the table before him. "Hi can bonly thank you for the favor, but Hi can pay you back the money; hand, bejove! Hi will!"

Thereupon he produced a fountain pen, and wrote his check in favor of Youngblood for a thousand dollars, his fat fingers trembling so much that he could with difficulty control the movements of the pen.

Youngblood accepted this check, with many protestations, but the detective observed that his fingers closed on it, nevertheless, with a covetous grasp, and that he shoved it down deep into his vest pocket, as if not in haste to part with it.

These mute evidences were all lost on the befuddled Briton, who likely would not have observed them had he been completely himself.

Chicago Charlie saw through Youngblood's cunning scheme at a glance; and indeed it required no shrewd mind to fathom it. It was merely one of the many tricks practiced by Youngblood to get hold of Fisher's money.

There had been no such detective officer on the Englishman's trail. No one had ever come to Youngblood's room, looking for Fisher to arrest him, as the sport had averred; and, consequently, Youngblood had never paid out any money to induce an abandonment of this object.

Solon Youngblood had simply taken advantage of the Englishman's credulity and lied him out of a thousand dollars. How many thousand more had been filched from Fisher's pockets by similar devices, Chicago Charlie could not guess; but he was pretty sure the figures would represent a large sum.

Solon Youngblood was "protecting" his English friend with a vengeance!

Chicago Charlie, though he had no great regard for the safety or comfort of the Briton, yet disliked exceedingly to see any one so robbed, and so resolved that he would do something to thwart the plans of Youngblood and his fellow harpies, if the opportunity presented.

Just now, though, he had other and more important work.

The question again rose strongly in his mind, as he sat there straining his ears to catch the talk wafted from the other table, of whether or not Walesey had knowledge, guilty or otherwise, of who killed John Malcomb?

The detective was still of the belief that the Englishman was not himself the murderer, though the talk just caught might lead to the inference that Fisher knew something of it—more than he had confessed at the time of the inquest.

There seemed no way of getting at the facts in the case, at any rate, and so the detective continued his watch, mentally jotting down all he saw and heard of a suspicious character.

It was very late when the two left the table. The Exposition grounds were ready to be closed. Midway Plaisance had emptied

itself of its crowding throngs. Only here and there was a man to be seen—some belated sightseer, who had overstayed.

Youngblood and Fisher made their way out of the beer garden of "The German Village," and apparently turned down the street toward the entrance. The detective delayed a little while, to avoid attention on their part, for the security given by numbers of people was now taken away, and he realized he must be circumspect.

What was his astonishment, on reaching the street, to find that Youngblood and the Englishman had disappeared! He could see them nowhere, though the lights ought to have made them visible in the then deserted condition of the thoroughfare.

Somewhat startled by this strange disappearance, and anxious lest they should elude him, he hurried along, looking everywhere for some signs of the missing men.

CHAPTER IX.

A MODERN DANIEL.

THE Columbian Detective was destined to a rude awakening from the secure belief that all his movements of the night had passed unobserved. He was to discover that the man he had set out to track was as wide-awake as any detective officer that ever followed a criminal.

Passing the Javanese village, there came sounds that momentarily drew his attention. He was standing at the moment where the light was not of the best. Then there fell on his ears the quick patter of nimble feet, and, almost before he was aware of it, a number of dark-visaged men leaped on him from the darkness and bore him to the earth.

He would have uttered a cry, but for the fact that a heavy cloth of some stifling texture had been thrown over his head at the moment of the attack and he was unable to call out.

He fought with desperation, struggling vainly to throw aside the cloth and free himself, when he was struck into insensibility by a heavy blow on the head.

The slight sounds made by the scuffle had drawn the attention of a watchman, but when that officer came hurrying in that direction all was as still as midnight about the scene of the combat!

The Javanese village lifted its queer roofs and turrets in the faint moonlight, and seemed slumbering as peacefully as if naught had occurred to disturb the serenity of its repose.

Who the dark-visaged men were it would have been difficult at the time to say. Only for the apparent fact that the peaceful Javanese could have no motive for the commission of such an act, they might have been thought the perpetrators of it.

Perhaps the place had been selected in the hope that they would be so accused, if the detective escaped and felt disposed to lay charges against any one.

The guardian of the peace of the place returned to his post of observation, a considerable distance away, and then a dark form showed itself in a shadowy corner where it had been lurking. Another came forth at the same moment, and a sifting moonbeam showed between them the white face of Chicago Charlie upturned toward the sky.

The other members of the assailing party had vanished, seemingly with as much mysteriousness and celerity as they had appeared.

When quite sure the attention of the guard was drawn in another direction, these two men lifted the unconscious form of the detective and bore it away from the spot.

There was little enough chance for them to have done this without being observed, only that they selected a time when the guard had turned on them his back and was slowly walking away.

Satisfied that all was right at the eastern end of the Midway, he was setting out to walk to the western end; and after him, as he thus advanced, crept the crouching forms of the two men, with the body of the officer between them.

When they had gained the vicinity of the big building occupied by the Hagenbeck Animal Show, they put the officer down, and one of them crept away as if on a tour of inspection.

He was back in a short time, and again they moved forward with their burden.

The long street was now apparently wrapped in slumber. The lights seemed to wink dimly and sleepily. The last visitor had departed and the gates of the great Exposition had been closed for the night. Should the watchman not turn back, there was little chance that the men would be seen.

They were as stealthy as a pair of panthers in their movements, and, whenever a light shone from any of the buildings, or there was a suspicious sound, they crept with their burden into the shadows lying heavily along the walls, and there waited until feeling that it would be safe to proceed.

They apparently had no fear that the detective would immediately come out of his unconscious state; and, even if he had done so, he would still have been unable to cry out, for the headcloth had not been removed.

But he lay so limply that any one might well have been deceived into thinking him dead.

Approaching now the big building containing the animal show, they pressed close up to it; and, finding a side entrance, which in some manner they managed to open, they crawled through, dragging the unconscious man after them.

After much search, for they seemed not thoroughly familiar with the place, they found a stairway that led them to the rooms above; hurrying on and not halting until they were in the vicinity of some of the big cages.

For a moment a lamp streamed across their faces, which were wet with sweat. Had any one been there to see, the faces would have been revealed as dark and desperate-looking;—not the faces of Americans, certainly.

It would have puzzled the keenest detective in Chicago to have given a plausible reason for this attack, by these men, on the Columbian Detective. Surely these fellows could have had no connection with Solon Youngblood and the Lakeside Leaguers, nor with any of the parties whom it was the desire of Chicago Charlie to ferret out.

One of the men, who was as fearless as a lion, in his way, approached the great cage containing the lions, whose roarings and scufflings had been so often witnessed from the street; and, removing the bar that held the door securely in place, looked in.

He was greeted by a low growl from one of the aroused lions. He paid no heed to it, however; but picking up the detective in his strong arms, he removed the cloth and hurled him by main force into the lions' den.

When he had done this, he closed the door as quickly, shot the bar into place, and the two men scudded away as fast as they could, leaving the imperiled officer alone with this new danger.

Doubtless they reasoned that he would be torn in pieces by the fierce brutes; probably mangled beyond recognition; and there would be no witness, therefore, to the dark deed that night committed. It would be the talk of the town for a few days, would absorb the attention of the newspapers and the public, be a ten days' sensation, and then be forgotten.

Almost immediately a series of fierce growls, which grew into angry roars, filled the ponderous cage and rumbled ominously through the rooms.

Then a big, black-maned brute got on his feet and shamled lazily forward from his corner; emitted a hoarse sound from his cavernous throat, and showed his yellow teeth in a wrathful way. He lashed his tail from side to side, as he approached the unconscious man with catlike softness.

The moonlight, streaming from without through the bars, gave to the scene a ghastly vividness.

The other lions watched, crouchingly and uneasily. The roars had subsided, and it might readily have been fancied they were awaiting in breathless suspense the result of the investigations of the black-maned monarch from the African jungles.

It was a most fortunate thing for the unconscious detective, lying thus in peril of his life, that the club which had knocked him senseless had not abraded the skin. There was no smell nor taint of blood on his person. He seemed more like a man lying asleep, with his face turned toward the moonlight.

The lion appeared to hesitate. He revealed his teeth again, as if he meant to pounce on the man, but closed the heavy jaws and contented himself with sniffing at the detective's face and clothing. Then, squatting flat on his belly, he gave the man a playful tap with one big paw, much as a cat taps at a mouse in play.

When this failed to arouse the man, he got up, sniffed him over again; and then returned yawningly and lazily to his corner, from whence he watched the prostrate form with his big, staring, yellow eyes.

The other lions likewise kept their gaze fixed on the man in mute anticipation, but remained sluggishly in their places. Having been fed but an hour or two before, they were lethargic and sleepy.

Their eyes were half-closed, their heavy heads resting on their paws, when a groan broke from the pallid lips of the detective, and he moved. Instantly they were alert and growling ominously.

Other groans and other movements of the limbs and body followed, the aroused beasts watching these developments with keen intentness.

Then Charlie came back from the land of clouds and shadow; and with a sigh of pain stared about and endeavored to sit up.

The motion was greeted by a deep-voiced roar, which had the immediate effect of restoring him to full consciousness.

He was bewildered by what he saw, and for a time could not tell where he was or recall the last acts of his conscious existence.

Then the almost deserted street came back to him, as he had last seen it, and with it the memory of those pattering feet. He started up again, when the strong recollection of the struggle near the Javanese village returned and the pain in his head told him how the struggle had terminated.

The rumbling roars of the lions were increasing in volume, and with his faculties once more clear he recognized his position.

The sifting moonlight rendered the interior of the cage distinctly visible and threw the threatening lions in strong relief.

Their angry attitude warned him of the necessity of caution; and a deep sense of terror, such as he had seldom felt, swept over him. To be thrown thus to savage beasts was a most horrible thing; and, in anticipation, he felt those gleaming, yellow teeth rending his flesh.

He drew back in fear, crowding closely against the bars. He would have called out, but a dread of the consequences held him silent. He had often seen those lions, in his walk up and down Midway Plaisance, but had never until then given them close attention.

However, he recalled how he had seen the keeper stalk into their midst, holding them at bay by the mere waving of a stick; and how they had crouchingly and instantly obeyed this keeper's commands.

The recollection gave him courage. He felt that he might accomplish what another man could, even though not a professional lion-trainer.

He was resolved to escape from the cage, and he was anxious to do it without attracting attention.

If he could reappear on the street, without a single scratch as a witness of what he had undergone, he felt it would be truly a victory. Besides, he was not willing that his name should be paraded in the papers, in the way he knew it would be, if the reporters got hold of the story.

Lifting himself a little, he looked about for the door through which he knew he had been thrust. It was within reach of his hand; and by a little further lifting of his body he might touch the heavy bar holding it in place.

The lions were still growling and shifting uneasily, but he drew himself half-erect and faced them with so stern a mien that they remained in their places, instead of leaping at him as he feared they would.

He then reached up and quietly slipped back the bar, drawing his body slowly toward the door, but keeping his eyes fixed on the threatening brutes.

Their uneasiness increased and their growls now welled in an angry chorus. Only the fierceness of his attitude seemed to keep them from springing on him.

He continued the slow movement of his body until he had brought his back against the door. Then, summoning all his energies, he quickly thrust the door open and sprang backward out of the cage.

The black maned brute leaped up with a roar that shook the building, and dashed quickly forward, his jaws widely distended. But his expected prey had escaped him! The door swung to with a rattling clang; and, the big bolt having been shot into place, the black-maned monarch did nothing but vainly dash his nose against the bars.

Hoarse roar on roar resounded, and the lions, with their angry bounds, shook the big cage from center to circumference.

Charlie heard a wrathful voice exclaiming, from another room:

"Blast them infernal lions! They're always fighting. They'll kill each other some of these nights."

The detective knew the voice was that of the keeper, who had been aroused from his slumber by the uproar, but he knew, too, that the keeper had no true idea of the cause of this outbreak among the big beasts.

So he scudded hurriedly to the stairway, down which he slipped with as much lightness and ease as was possible.

The outer entrance had been left unlocked by the villains who had borne the detective into the building, and Charlie had no trouble in making an exit.

On reaching the street he halted for a moment, listening anxiously. A cold perspiration bathed his body, and he realized that he was trembling as with an ague. He had been cool enough and courageous enough during the period of that trying ordeal. Now he felt faint and giddy, and grasped the wall to keep from falling.

No sounds came to show that the keeper had risen from his bed; and the growls of the lions were subsiding.

Satisfied that he had escaped unobserved, and thankful for his wonderful preservation, the detective slipped away through the deserted street, wondering how he was to get out of the Exposition grounds.

He was not only weak and sick, but he was stiff and sore, and his head ached terribly. He placed a hand to his head. The blow had been a severe one, as shown by the large prominence it had produced. He was so faint that he felt compelled to stop now and then and rest; but he finally reached the grounds of the Exposition proper; and, seeing no one near, scaled the high board wall, and set out in the direction of the city.

CHAPTER X.

WORLD'S FAIR WILLIE.

"ROBINSON CRUSOE had a cat;—
Poor old Robinson Crusoe!
He kept it in the top of his hat;—
Poor old Robinson Crusoe!"

Chicago Charlie, having caught a train at one of the outlying stations and thus reached the city, heard these nonsensical words, as he hurried along the street in the vicinity of the boat landing.

He thought he recognized the voice, and, quickening his footsteps, soon overhauled the singer.

It proved to be a shabbily-dressed boy, but one who had a peculiarly bright face, though the features were very dark. Although not more than fifteen years of age, there was in his manner the assertive alertness of experienced manhood. Such boys as he, cast adrift in the whirlpool of a great city, and who must sink or swim aided only by their own exertions, develop prematurely.

"Whither bound?" Clingstone called out, in cheery tone.

The lad came to a halt, under a blinking electric light, and stared curiously at his accoster.

It was plain he did not recognize the detective, though the latter was well known to him. He had not seen Charlie since the latter had doffed his policeman's garb.

The detective swept aside the disguising beard and again spoke, at the same time coming still nearer.

"What a lark!" the boy cried. "Say, you skeered me! I see you comin' along there and heard you a-hollerin'; and says I to my-

self: 'Wonder now what the duffer's up to? Hadn't any idee it was you!'"

"What are you doing now?" Clingstone questioned.

"Workin' the World's Fair."

"Like all the rest of 'em, eh?"

"You bet! Say, I've got the jolliest lay-out, down there! I've got the sellin' of papers in Midway. Made nighabout two dollars to-day! What's your lay?"

The detective laughed.

"Oh, you needn't grin! I know you're up to something, er you wouldn't be rigged up in *that* style. Hain't a cop any more, I reckon? Git bounced off the force?"

"We'll talk about that as we go along," said Clingstone, lowering his voice, as an example for the boy to do the same. "You haven't told me where you are going."

"Jist now I'm going home to look after the Infant Wonder. Then I'm going 'round to the newspaper offices and get my papers, fer I reckon the first edition is out now; and then you'll see me sliding for the Exposish, about daylight. I'm World's Fair Willie, now, you see, and I've got to hump myself, to keep up with the rush of biz!"

"Not Billy Stubbs any longer?"

"Only to old friends like you. To all my new and swell acquaintances I'm Wide-awake Willie of the World's Fair! See?"

The boy was rattling on at this gait, as they turned into a street leading westward from the lake.

The horse cars were already running, early as was the hour;—in fact they seemed to run all night—and Charlie, grasping the boy by the shoulder, led, or rather pushed him toward one.

"We'll get home quicker this way!" was his explanation. "I want to have a long talk with you, and I haven't any time to spare. I've got to get home myself, and get to bed, or I'll be down sick. I've been out all night, and my head aches fit to split. I think you can do some work for me; like you did once before, you remember?"

The boy looked at him inquiringly, winked to show that he understood him; and then the two climbed into the car.

They got off at Jefferson, and in a tenement house they found the home of the boy who had called himself World's Fair Willie.

It was a little room on the fourth floor, not much bigger than a large dry goods box; and to it they painfully toiled up several flights of creaking stairs.

Billy Stubbs pushed the door open, and, searching out a piece of candle from a corner, lighted it and set it on a low table. Then he pointed to a stool.

"Set down and make yourself to home. These here apartments ain't very big, and they're a little hard to git at, but they're cozy. This room an' that there closet there is what I calls my suite."

On a low bed in a corner of the little room a child was sleeping;—a chubby-faced little fellow, with the bed-clothing half kicked off of him, and one plump arm thrown above his head.

"The Wonder is doing all right, I see!" and Billy tip-toed softly to the bed and looked into the sleeping face. "You've no idee how that chap grows! It's a miracle! He was all skin an' bones when I took hold of him and made a hospital out of myself, and now he's as fat as the big woman in the side show. I've give him another name! You know I called him Tommy; but that was too common for a kid like him—an',—bein' it's the World's Fair year—I throwed Tommy aside as no good, 'ceptin' fer ordinary brats, an' christened him Christopher Columbus!"

"Christopher Columbus Stubbs!" and the detective nodded approvingly.

"I 'lowed mebbe the name 'u'd be a mascot. Mebbe he'll turn out a discoverer, and discover who his daddy and mammy is. Don't want 'im to do it in a hurry, though, for I've jist froze to him; an' the way he's tuck to me is good to see. He calls me 'Billy,' jist like he was growed up; an' when I told him t'other day that I was World's Fair Willie, he shook his yellow head, an' said: 'No! Dess Billy!' Oh! he's a good 'un!"

So pleasant were these reminiscences that the boy—who was but a waif himself—gave an awkward step of a dance, then thrust his

hands into his pockets and whistled a bar from the latest opera.

"He's doing finely!" Chicago Charlie admiringly commented.

"What was it you wanted of me?" and the boy turned from those interesting disclosures, remembering that Charlie had stated his time was limited.

"You recollect the work you did for me once?"

"Shadowing the tough that hung around Polk street station?"

"Yes. I've got some more work of the kind for you. As you see, by my change of clothing, I'm not on the regular force, just now. I've gone into a bit of special work."

"Private detective biz?"

"Not exactly. I've been assigned to run down a certain case, by the inspector!"

"Cricky!"

The boy drew up his knees, and looked earnestly over them at his visitor.

Then a shade darkened his face.

"'Fraid I can't do it, after all! There's that World's Fair business. I've got a route there that I ought to keep!"

"You can keep it. It's because you have that route that I think you can be of use to me."

"String yer narrative, then!" and the boy bobbed his head "Say yer say; an' I'm with ye, if it's somethin' I kin do."

"You know the Cairo street?"

"Do I know the Infant Wonder? Ask me something easy!"

"There's a girl in that street—one of the dancing girls—that I want you to shadow for me. She's the darkest one, and the best-looking one. She wears a silver girdle, and has a gold crescent set in her hair just above her forehead. She's the only one dressed just that way."

"Oh! I've seen her!" Billy announced, with great eagerness. "You see I've got the run of everything, with this newspaper lay, and there ain't many things in Midway that I hain't seen!"

"I want you to keep your eyes on her, every minute you can spare from your work. And you must do it in a way that she will suspect nothing. Do you think you can?"

"Yep!" and the boy drew his knees still higher and rested his chin on them. "I kin try as hard as the next feller! Is that all you want me to do?"

"I think you will find it quite enough. Of course you've got to use your wits. For instance, should it seem necessary at any time to watch any one else—some one who has said something or had a talk with her to arouse your suspicion—you are to do so."

The boy's expressive face showed that he comprehended.

"Same instructions as what you give me before!" and he put down his knees and laughed lightly.

Then his countenance grew serious.

"I didn't have the Infant Wonder with me then! That there chap's got to be looked after. Now the question is how am I to look after him and sell newspapers and do the shadder trick?"

He brightened instantly, however, and went on:

"There's the kindergarten. I'd fergot about that. I've been leavin' him there every day, same as the other hard workin' mothers round here has been a-leavin' of their kids. But I don't know how it would be about nights. They told me when I first went there that they wouldn't on no account keep the Infant Wonder after six o'clock in the evenin', and that I'd got to hustle myself back at that time no matter what happened. The old woman's pretty vinegary at times, and I don't know but she'd 'a' pitched Christopher Columbus into the streets. I didn't never give her the chance!"

The child on the bed stirred uneasily, as if this talk awoke in his slumbering mind unpleasant memories.

Charlie looked at his watch. The gray dawn was showing through the dirty east window the only window in the room.

"It's time for you to be seeing about your papers. Christopher Columbus is doing all right and will probably sleep like a top for three or four hours yet. I'll stay with him, though, for I don't feel like doin' anything. I was never more beat out in my life. When you come back we'll go down to the kinder-

garten and see what arrangements we can make. It must be fixed so that you can have your whole time to give to this work, if necessary."

Billy Stubbs was manifestly delighted.

"All right," he declared. "That suits me to a dot."

Then he picked up his hat, tiptoed quietly to the stairway, and Chicago Charlie heard him bounding and leaping on his way down to the street.

"I couldn't have found a better ally," the detective mused, putting his hand to his paining head. "My! how that lump hurts."

Then he stretched himself on the floor; and in a few minutes was sleeping as soundly as was the Infant Wonder.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEWSBOY AS A SHADOWER.

WHEN Christopher Columbus Stubbs awoke that morning and looked drowsily about him, he was much surprised to find a man sleeping on the floor, instead of his newsboy guardian.

He immediately began to cry; and, this arousing the detective, the two might have been seen the next instant sitting bolt upright, staring at each other and digging at their eyes.

"Hello, Infant Wonder!" the detective laughingly called out. "You've tuned up rather early. Spoiled my nap, too!"

The child continuing to cry, he went over to the bed, and soon had the little fellow snuggling contentedly in his arms.

Billy Stubbs found them thus, a few minutes later, and expressed his approval in his usual boyish, boisterous fashion.

When the newsboy had told all he had to tell of his morning's experiences, the three left the room, obtained a breakfast at the nearest restaurant at the detective's expense, and then took their way leisurely toward the kindergarten, which was only a few blocks distant.

It was a raw, disagreeable morning. The wind blustered around the corners, the clouds hung loweringly, and there was threat of rain. But the eyes of the Infant Wonder, who toddled unsteadily between the two, the shabby street and the threatening heavens were only vistas opening into wonderland.

Christopher Columbus could talk, so Billy alleged, but it must have been in some foreign language, for Chicago Charlie could scarcely understand a word of his prattle.

The kindergarten, which had been established and was run by the Society for the Cultivation of Christian Charity and the Amelioration of the Condition of Working Women—the Alphabet Society, as Billy Stubbs called it, because of its interminable initials—the S. C. C. C. A. C. W. W.—was located in a dingy, brown house, set some distance back from the street, and which was reached by a double flight of stairs.

A thin, nervous woman, with a cast in one eye, and who possessed a buzz-saw voice not at all calculated to soothe a scared infant, responded to their pull at the bell.

She frowned, when she saw that a stranger accompanied Billy and the Infant Wonder.

The latter began to cry to return to the street. Whether this was the effect of her chilling presence and memories of unpleasant days spent there, Chicago Charlie could not tell.

He had doffed his hat, when she appeared, and now began to explain why he had called.

"We couldn't think of such a thing," she asserted, with some asperity. "It's enough to worry with the children through the daytime!"

But after some further conversation, in which the detective offered her ten times what she received for keeping a child throughout the daylight hours, the Infant Wonder was admitted into the kindergarten under the new stipulations:—which were, that Christopher Columbus Stubbs was to be kept there daily from sun to sun, excepting at such times as Billy should wish it otherwise.

When the detective and Billy were again in the street, the boy began a voluminous rehearsal of how he had found the Infant Wonder stumbling about, one dark night,

in dangerous proximity to the lake; of how he had taken him home; and of how, when he could not, by advertising and otherwise, gain any clue to the child's parentage, he had resolved to adopt the pretty little fellow and "turn himself into a hospital."

"Why didn't you get the assistance of the police?" Chicago Charlie queried.

"And didn't I? And what good did it do? They was a-goin' fer to send him to some institution or other; and thinks I, 'if they're a-goin' to do that, I'm a better institution than they'll find!' an so I jist kep' him."

The boy and the detective officer separated, almost as soon as this marvelous story was told, each going their different ways: Chicago Charlie to his room, in search of needed rest, and Billy Stubbs back to the World's Fair, to enter on his new mission.

Midway Plaisance was crowded that day, in spite of the threat of a storm. The boy was alert throughout all the long hours, only leaving when it was time for the evening papers.

But nothing rewarded his diligence.

That night, however, he had cause to congratulate himself on the closeness of his watch.

He had wormed himself without observation into the Cairo street, and was lying with nose thrust almost against the paws of one of the big sphinxes, when he beheld the Ghawazee, whom he had been directed to shadow, come out of one of the buildings and walk uneasily about, as if expecting some one.

The expected party was not long in arriving. He was a little fellow, almost as dark as the girl, with a feminine slightness of form, and his tread fell as softly as that of a tiger.

Like a flash came to the boy the thought, that here was the real murderer!

He appeared to start up out of the ground, for Billy did not see him come through the gate.

That the two were lovers was soon made apparent. They withdrew into a dark corner, as if to escape any unfriendly gaze, and remained there for more than an hour, in close conversation.

Then Billy saw the man kiss the Ghawazee, as he arose to go, and saw her steal back through the doorway.

"I reckon I'd better foller that there chap!" the watching newsboy observed. "No use hanging 'round this bit of Egypt all night! I'll not git to see the girl ag'in; that's certain."

When the man slipped out through the gate into Midway, Billy was close at his heels, for the hour was so late that, though the gate had not been closed and locked, the gatekeeper had relaxed his vigilance.

Hurrying to the west end of the thoroughfare, the man sought a concealed point, and scaled the fence, exhibiting remarkable agility.

Not to be outdone, Billy Stubbs imitated his example, scrambling over the high wall in some fashion; and then pursued the little man through the vacant lots that lay thereabout.

It did not take Billy Stubbs long to tell that the fellow was heading for the Gypsy camp, and he knew then that the little man was a Gypsy and a member of the band camped there.

The fact that the Gypsy had thus met the dancing girl struck the boy shadower as somewhat strange, but he gave it little heed at the time, being fully occupied with the task in hand.

When the Gypsy entered one of the tents, he was greeted by a grumbling voice. Billy had never heard it before, but it was the voice of Gypsy Nell, the fortune-teller.

"Ye'r prancin' 'round turrible late to-night, Zelna Magruder!" the voice grumbled. "Why can't you come in like you ought, and let them that wants to sleep, sleep?"

Billy had sneaked close up to the tent, and could readily hear every word.

"Business, Nell! Do you think there's nothin' to do but set around an' tell fortunes?"

His tones were squeaky and thin, and reminded Billy of the squeal of a rat.

"The business you're into will hang you one o' these days. You'll find I'm a true fortune-teller in that! What are you up to, anyway? What in the world, Zel, air you scratchin' at?"

"I'm gittin' my heavy coat!" he growled back, irritated by her nagging. "I've got to go out on the lake to-night, and it looks dark enough to blow."

"Better put it off!" she urged, and Billy could tell that she had arisen.

"If I'm bound to be hung, as you say, there's no danger of my drowning!"

"What do you have to go out fer?" she whined.

"Oh! bother! Don't ask me sech questions! You're allus pestering me. You ought to know. There's a cargo of stuff comin' in, an' the officers have got scent of it. I've got to warn the boys!"

"You'd better pull out of that league business, Zel Magruder! If ye don't, you'll wish, one o' these days, you had. I don't no as I'll care, though!"

"Go to thunder!" was his ungracious exclamation. "When I want yer advice I'll ask it."

He had found his coat and instantly quitted the tent, his form being revealed as he passed through the entrance, in the fan of light from the lamp he had lit.

Billy, still crouching and watching, saw the crone come to the door and shake her fist at the darkness after him.

"You're an evil hound, Zel Magruder, and I'll be even with you yit! Mind my word!"

Then she went back and blew out the lamp, and Billy Stubbs hurried away on the trail of the receding Gypsy.

CHAPTER XII.

FIGHTING FOR LIFE.

BILLY STUBBS permitted the oars to rest in the rowlocks, and bent forward to listen. About him the night winds sung, blowing fresh and strong toward the land. The blackness of darkness was over him. Behind him, lights gleamed from many of the houses, late as was the hour. Before him and beneath him rolled the waters of Lake Michigan, the waves tossing now and then into white crests.

Billy Stubbs had followed Zel Magruder to the lake front, and had there seen him enter a boat and pull out into the lake.

He remembered what he had heard Magruder say to the Gypsy woman!

"There's a cargo of stuff comin' in, an' the officers have got scent of it. I've got to warn the boys!"

Who those "boys" were and what it all meant the newsboy was determined to know. It might be a matter of importance to Detective Charlie, and it might not; but, whatever it was, he felt that it was his business to find out.

There had been another boat lying in the water, close to the one Magruder had taken; and Billy finding little trouble in releasing the painter, had climbed cautiously into it, and now was paddling out into the lake after the Gypsy.

It seemed rather a reckless thing, in view of the darkness and the state of the weather. But Billy Stubbs, when his detective blood was up, was given to doing reckless things.

Bending forward now on his oars, he heard the "thump, thump" of the oars in the Gypsy's boat; and getting his bearings anew from the sound, he also rowed on, endeavoring to keep a direct course by watching the lights in the houses.

Twice the noise of the Gypsy's rowing ceased in that unaccountable manner, each time forcing Billy to await the renewal of the strokes.

Fancying the sounds of his own oars might have been heard by Magruder and the latter thus warned, he became exceedingly cautious in his movements, lifting and dipping the oars with great care.

Magruder was heading down the lake toward the White City, he having taken to the water more than half a mile above the northern limit of the Exposition grounds. He had swept far out in the lake and was almost in the track daily and nightly pursued by the boat of the World's Fair Steamship Company.

When almost opposite the big brick ship erected and armed to represent a regular U. S. Line of Battle Ship, Billy Stubbs became again aware that the sounds of Magruder's rowing had ceased.

He lay to on his oars, as he had done be--

fore, listening intently for some renewal of the noise to guide him.

A minute; two minutes; five minutes, passed away; and the silence of the night and darkness continued to brood over the waters.

The flashing of lights from the Exposition buildings came now and then, but they served only to render the darkness seemingly more intense.

For some time Billy had known that the wind was increasing in violence and that the waves were running higher. There was not enough of a "blow," however, to give him any uneasiness on that account. He could handle a boat fairly well, and felt at home on the water.

But he became anxious as the minutes slipped by and no sounds came to tell him that the Gypsy's boat was anywhere near.

When nearly ten minutes had passed, and still there came nothing to indicate the Gypsy's near presence, the boy pulled slowly and quietly forward.

He was now thoroughly alarmed, believing that Magruder had given him the slip and that all his work of the night was thus to come to naught.

But he had not pulled fifty yards when he was undeceived.

Magruder's boat loomed out of the darkness, in which it had been hidden, and the Gypsy, pulling at the oars, quickly laid it alongside.

"Curse you, you spy!" came the low words; and at the same instant Billy felt one of the Gypsy's oars strike him.

He gave a low cry, for the pain of the blow stung him, and he was thoroughly startled.

But he did not lose his presence of mind, in the face of this unexpected peril. He grasped the oar, letting his own drop, and clung on so tightly that Magruder could not draw it away.

"Curse you!" the Gypsy cried, striving to draw the oar away.

For reply, Billy clung with the tenacity of a leech, and the two boats, set in motion, bumped together so violently that the occupants came near being thrown into the water.

So nearly did Billy Stubbs come to being hurled overboard, that, in order to save himself, he had to let go the oar.

As a result the boats swung apart, when the Gypsy again lifting the blade, aimed another murderous blow at the newsboy's head.

Billy sought vainly for the oars he had dropped. The shaking of the boat had loosened them from their places, and they had slipped into the lake! Escape by flight seemed, therefore, hopeless.

He had deftly avoided the second blow of the Gypsy's oar by quickly ducking his head; and when another blow was aimed at him—for the Gypsy had again brought his boat within reach, the boy tried to catch it as before.

With a horrible oath the Gypsy jerked it away, almost falling out of his boat. But at that moment Billy was blinded by a lightning-like flash.

There was a loud report, and a pistol ball cut through the air within an inch of his head.

Z! Magruder had grown desperate.

Billy Stubbs saw the pistol hand lifted again, and raised himself to leap into the lake; but before he could reach the water the report rung out once more, sharp and clear, and Billy Stubbs seemed to sink out of sight like a lump of lead.

"One infernal spy out of the way, anyhow!" Magruder growled, setting his oars in place, at the same time keenly watching to see if the boy arose to the surface.

He observed that Billy's boat was drifting landward. It was but a few yards away, slowly drifting toward the shore, but the gloom already rendered it nearly invisible.

"That last ball caught him between wind and water!" was the heartless comment, peering still over the black, tossing waves. "He'll never come up till he floats up, ready for the morgue. I wonder who he was, anyhow? Spies are getting terrible thick and bold, lately."

"Well, he'll not bother me any more!" With this, certain that Billy was done for, he bent on the oars and pulled further out into the lake.

CHAPTER XIII.

A REMARKABLE LETTER.

CHICAGO CHARLIE, sitting silently in the seclusion of his room, had much to cogitate on.

He felt nearly done up. The wound on his head still pained him, and he was so stiff and sore from his late exertions that he felt scarcely able to move about.

Nevertheless, his interest quickened, when his mail was brought in and he saw that one of the letters was from Daisy Malcomb.

He tore it hastily open, eager to get at the contents.

As he ran down the page, his eyes dilated, his cheeks whitened, and his breath came in gasps.

This is what he read:

"CHICAGO, June 7, 1893.

"DEAR CHARLIE:—I must beg your pardon in advance, for writing these lines, that I know will so pain you. But, indeed! indeed, dear Charlie! I have convinced myself that it is the thing I ought to do. I fear you will never forgive me, though I shall pray for your forgiveness to my dying day.

"I am forced to tell you that I can see you no more! No more! My God! how can I write it? But it is true. You must not think of trying to trace me. It would be useless, and I do not desire that you should. I want you to forget that there ever was such a miserable girl on earth. Seek some one else, whom you can marry happily, and forget me.

"Oh! I don't know what I am saying! I feel that I want you to remember me always, yes, I am even selfish enough to want you to remain single; as I shall do. But no! No! That would not be right. There are many girls you might find in this city, or in other cities, much handsomer and in every way better suited to you. Find one; and make her happy by marrying her;—for I am sure that whoever becomes your wife must be a happy woman!

"And do not think of me too harshly, dear Charlie! Do not think me cruel and hard. Do not think, either, that I am driven to do this. It is of my own free choosing. I cannot explain to you why I do it. You will never know. But believe always that I felt it to be best for both of us.

"And, dear Charlie! should you cherish my memory, as I shall cherish yours—do not, for Heaven's sake, do not ever believe that I could be so wicked as to kill my own father! I am unworthy of you—and I know you must learn to hate me!—but do not, do not believe that!

"Now, good-by!—and do not try to search for me, for it will be useless. Good-by! Good-by!

"Your unfortunate and miserable
"DAISY."

The ashy fingers of the strong, young Columbian Detective shook, as he held the paper and stared at these lines. He could not credit his eyesight. Surely, he felt, this must be some horrible dream. It could not be a reality.

Yet, he knew that those lines had been penned by Daisy Malcomb. This was no counterfeit of her handwriting—no forgery. The letters, the words, were hers. And she had written that way to him! To her promised husband! To the man she had parted from not fifty hours before, with embraces and loving words.

Again and again the detective ran over the lines, feeling that there must be a mistake somewhere; that the letter must have been written in jest, and there was an explanatory key, if he could but find it. But he was driven to acknowledge that this was wholly untenable.

He did not look at the other letters that lay on the table, mutely bidding him to read them; but took up his hat, thrust Daisy's strange communication into his pocket, and strode toward the door.

There he stopped and hesitated.

A glance at the mirror had shown him that his eyes were shining unnaturally and that his face was as white as that of a corpse. He looked more like a dead man galvanized into temporary activity than a man in whom the warm life-currents were still coursing.

He felt that he ought not go on the street looking like that.

The letter burned in his pocket.

He could not resist the temptation to look at it again.

He turned to the words, to make sure they were there:

"Do not ever believe that I could be so wicked as to kill my own father!"

Why had Daisy Malcomb written that? It struck him that here might be the clue to the secret!

Some one might have led her to think that Chicago Charlie, in his detective search, had come on evidence convincing him that she was the murderess!

"Good God! Can anybody have been so!"

The sweat of despair stood on his forehead.

He could think of no one who could have done it;—who, even if base enough, could have induced Daisy to give heed to it.

The position seemed so foolish that he cast it aside, and sought for some other.

There was no explanation—there could be none! save what appeared in the letter itself!

Daisy had bidden him an everlasting farewell, claimed herself an unfortunate miserable girl, and assured him it would be useless to search for her.

He was struck dumb by the overwhelming catastrophe that had so suddenly come on him. His fertility of resource stood on no avail. He felt bound, helpless, stricken unto death.

"I will find her!" he declared, turning desperately toward the street. "If she is alive, I will find her, if it takes all the years of my life! There's some devil's work here! I'll find out what it is! She must have been crazy when she wrote that. Crazy with despair; with grief! Some fiend has driven her to do that?"

Yet, when he came to sift this idea, it seemed to have as little foundation as the exploded ones that had preceded it. Who was there to so frighten or influence Daisy Malcomb? No one! She might, indeed, have lost her mind, and written the letter while under the influence of derangement and delirium! There seemed no other explanation.

He found himself in the street, without knowing just how he got there; and sought the nearest cab.

He had determined to visit Daisy's home, and begin his investigations of the mystery there.

Though the cab rattled furiously through the crowded streets—he having enjoined the driver to haste—the pace seemed provokingly slow.

He was in a fever of impatience, and could brook no delay, chafing under this seeming slowness like a high-spirited horse.

He half-expected, on arriving at Malcomb's, to find the doors closed and the shutters up. But the house showed every appearance of being still occupied.

Hoping that there might still be some mistake, and that Daisy might meet and greet him as before, he dismissed the cab and bounded up the walk.

He observed that a strange man was doing the work about the yard, and the woman who came in answer to his ring had also an unknown face. The house was the same, but the servants were not!

"Is Miss Daisy Malcomb in?" he queried, trembling in spite of his best efforts.

The maid glanced at him wonderingly, struck by his pallid, shaky look.

"I don't know any one by that name," she replied. "I just came here this morning. Shall I inquire of the housekeeper?"

"Send her here," he requested, catching at the door to keep from falling. "You are quite sure Miss Malcomb isn't here?"

The maid darted away, convinced that she had encountered a madman; but soon returned, with the housekeeper at her heels, who was followed by a gawking, curious servant.

It stung Charlie to have these people stare at him as if he were some specimen in the zoo;—stung him the more, for it told him that his agitation had loudly proclaimed itself.

"Who occupies this, house, then?" he asked, when the housekeeper assured him that no one by the name of Daisy Malcomb was to be found there.

The answer nearly prostrated the detective:

"Colonel Solon Youngblood!"

Chicago Charlie made the housekeeper speak the name and title again, before he could trust that he had heard aright; then, as quietly as possible, he requested to see Youngblood.

He had been told that Youngblood was at home; and, following the housekeeper, entered the little waiting-room, where Daisy, in the happy days gone by, had so often welcomed him.

The furniture was the same; and, looking at it, he found it difficult to rid himself even yet of the idea that she would meet him there.

But the heavy tread heard in the corridor was not that of Daisy Malcomb; and a moment later, Solon Youngblood stood before him.

If Youngblood knew him, he affected not to recognize him on this occasion; but stood, as if awaiting an explanation of the call.

"Your name is Youngblood, I believe?" the detective said, awkwardly rising, for he had never felt so ill at ease. "You will pardon me, I hope, when I ask how long you have occupied this house? I came to see a young lady who I thought lived here, and find that a change has been made!"

"Ah! yes." And Youngblood smiled more amiably, and took a seat. "We only moved in here yesterday. The property came to me through purchase. I have owned it for some time, but only took possession yesterday."

"This is the house of John Malcomb?"

"It was the house of John Malcomb, before it became mine. Malcomb, as you probably know, is dead!"

"And his daughter?"

"Well, really now, you wouldn't expect me to keep track of people that way? I can't tell you, sir, where she is!"

The tones were rising and testy.

"Was she not here yesterday?"

"Neither can I tell you that, sir! She was not here when we came in!"

"And you do not know where she is to be found?"

"I have already told you I do not!"

He frowned and shifted uneasily, as if annoyed.

"One question more, if you will allow me?"

Youngblood nodded.

"When did you buy this house?"

The new proprietor arose in evident disgust and anger.

"All such questions may be answered by inquiry at the proper place. To save you search, though, I will say, that the property has been mortgaged to me for a long time, and that shortly before his unfortunate taking off, John Malcomb, finding he could not pay out, gave me a clear deed. I hope you are satisfied sir; and now I will wish you, good-day!"

He turned back into the corridor, leaving the detective to pick his way blindly into the street.

Instead of finding a key to the mystery, the mystery had deepened.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE REVENUE CUTTER, ANDREW JOHNSON.

WHEN Zel Magruder rowed away into the thick darkness that lay over the lake, he was firmly convinced that the boy spy who had been following him had sunk to his death in the black waters.

Yet Zel Magruder was a sorely mistaken man.

The whizzing bullet had sped by as harmlessly as had the first, and Billy Stubbs went into the water wholly uninjured.

He had not leaped without knowing what he was doing. He had seen that to remain would be to court death, for the Gypsy's shot proved that the Gypsy meant to murder him.

Therefore, when he felt the waves curling over his head, he closed his lips firmly, and, striking out boldly, for he was a reasonably good swimmer—he pulled away from the dangerous vicinity as fast as he could.

When forced to rise, he could see nothing, even after he had freed his eyes from the water. Sure, though, that the Gypsy was watching for him only a few yards

away, he remained perfectly quiet; supporting himself, not without difficulty.

Something bumped against him, and, putting out a hand, he discovered it to be one of the oars of his boat.

This was a God-send; and he clung to it, as drowning men are said to cling to straws.

With its aid, he found his position in the water much easier; but he did not essay to swim, convinced that Magruder was still within hearing distance.

Not until he heard the Gypsy's boat moving away, did he turn his face toward the land. Then he put forth all his strength, though his progress was slow, both owing to the high waves and the interference of the oar, to which he thought it best to cling.

Suddenly there came the rattle of more oars; a number of them this time, showing that the approaching boat was not Magruder's.

Then a clear voice rung over the water.

"Ahoy, there! Ahoy!"

It was manifestly a friendly call, and Billy answered it, in as loud tones as he could command.

The sounds of the oars told him the course of the boat had been shifted.

Again the voice called, and again Billy replied.

Then the boat loomed dimly alongside, seeming gigantic because of its illy-defined shape.

Billy shouted once more, to make his position known, and a muscular hand reached down from the bow, and seized him by the collar and drew him into the boat.

The newsboy was as wet as a drowned rat, but the chill produced by his uncomfortable bath was likely to be the only unpleasant effect of his novel adventure.

As soon as he was safe in the boat, he was sharply questioned, and the boat's head was turned about.

Within twenty minutes thereafter he found himself on the U. S. Revenue Steamer, Andrew Johnson, then lying at anchor near the Government exhibits, and learned that the crew of the boat that had rescued him had belonged to the vessel.

The men of the Andy Johnson, as she was familiarly called, had heard the shots from the Gypsy's revolver, and thinking something must be wrong, had sent a boat's crew to investigate the cause of the shots.

Billy had scarcely stepped on the deck of the cutter, his face plainly revealed in the bright light, when a roar of recognition greeted him and a bushy-bearded sailor scrambled forward.

"Well, may I be hanged! if that ain't Billy Stubbs! Come here, you lively rascal! What have you been doin' swimmin' round out there in the lake?"

Billy had partially acquainted the boat's crew with what had befallen him, and he proceeded to give a brief account of his adventures to this sailor friend, Jack Rackstraw.

Before he had concluded, and while he was still dripping wet, Rackstraw seized him by the shoulder and pushed him toward the companion-way leading to the captain's cabin.

"Tell that to Cap'n Stebbins, will ye? Don't go to babblin' too much of it hyer to the crew? mum's the word to them!"

Then, pushing him in advance into the captain's presence, Rackstraw bawled out, in a big voice!

"Beg pardon, Cap'n Stebbins! but hyer's a youngster, that I'm well-acquainted with, that's got a yarn I think you'll like to hear!"

"Spit it out, youngster!"

This last to Billy, who stood somewhat ashamed.

Stebbins was a pleasant-looking man, in a neat uniform—his appearance nothing indicative of the sailor and commander and fighting man that he really was—and he questioned the boy kindly enough, taking no apparent notice of the streams of water that trickled from Billy's clothing to the carpet.

His interest became intense, as Billy plunged into the narrative.

"A cargo coming in, and he went to warn those in charge of it, eh?" commenting on that part of the story which touched on Magruder's words to the old crone. "That seems to be information worth havin'! I think you and your friend, Charlie Cling-

stone, are looking after the same rascals that we're hunting. If so, probably we can be of mutual help."

"Here, Rackstraw, take this boy away and give him something to eat and something hot, and warm clothes, too!"

And before Rackstraw could obey the order, he had turned to his desk and commenced to write.

Rackstraw led Billy Stubbs away, gave him some warm drinks, and a suit of clothing that was a world too large for him, talking all the while of what had recently befallen the boy.

The rough sailor seemed to have a friendly spot in his heart for the waif, whom he had met and become acquainted with many months before. It was while Rackstraw had been hanging about the city doing next to nothing but kill time. Billy Stubbs had sold papers to him and blacked his boots, and the acquaintance thus auspiciously begun had grown gradually to its present proportions.

"Shouldn't be s'prised if the cap'n does the han'some thing by you fer givin' him that tip. The feller you had the fight with was most likely one of them smugglers we have been looking for so long. You'd stand high, if we should chance to ketch 'em through you."

The mental picture of the great benefits to be derived by his friend, Billy Stubbs, from this happy consummation, was so rose-tinged that a huge roar of laughter escaped him, indicative of his pleasure.

"When you're a millionyer up a tree, an' I'm still nothing but poor Jack, mebber you'll drop me down a dollar er two, eh! Master Billy?"

He stood back, cocked his hat sidewise, and critically surveyed the changed apparel.

"If anybody makes any remarks about them clo'es, jist tell them that your tailor went on a strike. Hello! there's the cap'n a-wantin' us a'ready."

When they were again in the captain's room, the captain gave Rackstraw an indorsed letter; remarking, as he glanced at the boy:

"We're going to lie out in the lake, on the lookout for your recent acquaintance and his friends. We can only hope we may run foul of them."

"You shouldn't have taken that boat I suppose, as it wasn't yours; but I'll have it looked up in the morning and restored to its owner. We can arrange about the charges, some time, should there be any."

"Mr. Rackstraw, here, will accompany you on shore, and together you will hunt up Mr. Clingstone. You will each then be guided by his advice."

"Whoopee!"

Honest Jack Rackstraw gave utterance to this exclamation, as soon as they were out of the captain's apartment.

"There's a leave of absence in that paper, I'll bet a month's wages. And that leave of absence means a lakeful of adventure and fun. Come along!"

They heard a boat drop into the water and knew that they were to be immediately rowed ashore.

Then they were in the boat, with its bow pointed toward the land, and the strong-armed crew sending it along at a gallant speed.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRIPARTITE ALLIANCE.

THE mystery surrounding the disappearance of Daisy Malcomb proved impenetrable. Do what he would, Chicago Charlie could not clear it away; nor could he form any reasonable theory by which it might be explained. In fact, the more he thought of it and pondered over it the more inexplicable did it become; until, through grief and anxiety and baffled hopes, he was well nigh insane.

The possession of the house of Solon Youngblood was a piece with the mysterious disappearance of the girl. That Youngblood had a right to the property was, however, soon shown; for, an examination of the proper records revealed that Youngblood's statements concerning the mortgage and deed were in every essential correct.

He wondered whether or not a discovery that the house and ground belonged to Youngblood had had anything to do with Daisy's singular act. Then he accused himself of brutality, in harboring so foolish a suggestion, and put it from him.

He was in this frame of mind when Rackstraw and Billy Stubbs found him—bursting in on him with all the radiance of discovery and hope. But it would have required more than their unusual exuberance of spirits to drive the chill from the heart of Chicago Charlie.

Yet he greeted Rackstraw warmly, when the latter had been introduced by Billy Stubbs; and, when he had read the letter from the captain, had been told that Rackstraw had met John Malcomb, in the latter's lifetime, and had listened to Billy's stirring account of the adventures of the night, he sat down to a discussion of the situation.

He saw that it was essential to continue the pursuit of the Gypsy and his associates, for there was irrefutable proof that the men the Gypsy had started to warn were members of the band led by Solon Youngblood. It was a fair inference, therefore that among these men were to be found the proofs he was seeking.

Yet this last startling phenomenon—the singular letter and the absence of the girl—had almost turned his thoughts from the slayer of John Malcomb; though duty, and a hope that a solution of one mystery would clear up the other, urged him to continue work along that line.

He had reached the conclusion, however, that the task to which he must give his individual attention was the shadowing of Solon Youngblood and the latter's intimate associates. He felt sure, though without positive proof, that Solon Youngblood could at that moment have laid bare the mystery of the disappearance of Daisy Malcomb, as well as that surrounding the murder of Daisy's father. He felt that the two were linked puzzles, solvable by one and the same means.

These reflections, indefinite and shapeless to be sure, were crowding his mind, even while he talked to the sailor and Billy, and discussed with them plans for the shadowing and ultimate capture of Zel Magruder and his companions.

When he had laid out for them the work he desired them to do—for Captain Stebbins, in his letter, had placed Rackstraw at the detective's disposal, with unlimited leave of absence—he shook them by the hand; and, when he had seen them depart, turned again to the task that was so engrossing him.

Chicago Charlie had seemingly aged in a dozen hours as much as if a dozen years had rolled over his head. Not only had he apparently aged, but there was in his face such a drawn and tense look, that he started back with almost a cry of fright, when he surveyed his features in the glass.

"This will never do!" he thought. "My face betrays me. It tells too much. I must either learn to hold my feelings and emotions in check, or quit the perilous business in which I have engaged!"

He had come to a seeming rash resolve, and now proceeded to get ready for its execution.

With a keen razor, he removed from his face every trace of a beard. The mustaches on which he had so prided himself were ruthlessly sacrificed.

"They will grow again!" he grimly muttered, as he nervously removed them. "At any rate, what does it matter?"

He was thinking that nothing mattered, now that Daisy was lost to him.

When he had cut away the beard and mustache, he got some pigment from his trunk, and by its skillful application tanned his face to a dark hue, and so changed the general appearance of his physiognomy that his best friend meeting him in the street would never have known him.

He surveyed himself again in the mirror, this time with marked satisfaction.

The transformation was really little short of marvelous.

"I think I can run the gantlet, now!" he commented, in a pleased whisper. "And—if my disguise should be penetrated!"

The black look that overspread his face emphasized an apparent threat.

The resolution he had taken was this:

He would seek employment in Young-

blood's house, if possible, even though the employment should be the most menial.

Failing in that, he would obtain such work as would place him where he could constantly watch the house and grounds. He was skilled as a florist, having taken much pride as an amateur in the cultivation of flowers, and he thought it possible that his knowledge in this, would secure him work in some of the gardens near the Malcomb residence, if not in the Malcomb grounds.

With this in his mind, and his plans fully matured, he descended into the street.

So swiftly had the hours sped, that it was now evening, and the streets were thronged by the thousands of working men and women returning from their daily employment, and by other thousands of clerks and business men hastening homeward from their books and ledgers.

All were crowding in Chicago haste, no one heeding his neighbor.

Chicago Charlie stood, after having reached the street, waiting for a coming car, when a carriage dashed furiously around a corner.

He recognized it as the opportune moment of his life, for in the carriage, in imminent peril of their lives, were Colonel Solon Youngblood and the handsome woman who called herself his wife!

CHAPTER XVI.

"I HAVE HEARD THAT GRAVEYARDS YAWN."

COLONEL SOLON YOUNGBLOOD recognized his peril, but was powerless to aid himself or the woman at his side. The horse, a spirited animal, had taken fright at a fluttering paper that rolled between his feet, and had immediately become unmanageable. Leaping forward, with Youngblood clinging desperately to the reins, the latter had parted, and the animal was now tearing wildly along, not only threatening the lives of the occupants of the bounding carriage, but the lives of the people in the street.

A police officer tried vainly to stay the horse's progress, and men, in that foolish fashion so common on such occasions, "shooed" the animal and waved their hats, unaware of the palpable fact that their antics only served to increased the fright of a beast that was already insane from fear.

Narrowly escaping collision with a huge beer wagon, the carriage bounded toward the side that Chicago Charlie was on, and where he had stationed and nerved himself for an effort at checking the horse's speed.

Youngblood, livid with fear, was trying to get hold of the broken and dragging lines; while the woman at his side seemed half unconscious through fright.

With a bound that would have done credit to a professional athlete, Charlie left the pavement, hurled himself directly across the path of the scared brute, and, then, grasping the bridle-bit, hung on for dear life.

People scattered in all directions. Men yelled and women screamed.

But the nervy detective never released his hold, though it looked for a moment or two as if he were sure to get his brains dashed out.

His powerful hands at length succeeded in drawing back the head of the straining brute, until the forward movement was checked. Then, with a twist Charlie drew the head still further around, and the horse came down in a heap, piling the buggy almost on top of the detective, who had leaped aside to escape the thrashing heels that beat the air like ponderous flails.

A dozen men sprung to the detective's assistance, some freeing the occupants of the buggy from the wreck, and others helping the rescuer to hold and subdue the horse.

It was seemingly all over in a minute, and the horse, panting and broken in spirit, was standing quietly, but with streaming flanks, Chicago Charlie's hand still securely on the bit.

Youngblood, having convinced himself that he had escaped, and also that the woman was uninjured, came forward to thank the man who had risked his life thus to help him, at the same time effusively drawing out his purse.

There are some men who think that any

favor may be offset by the payment of cash, and Solon Youngblood was of the number.

He did not at all recognize Chicago Charlie, but took him for a total stranger.

Flourishing a hundred-dollar bill, he held it out, at the same time saying:

"I can never thank you enough, my good friend, for what you have done, and so offer this!"

Youngblood's tone was offensively patronizing.

"Keep it!" the detective exclaimed, with voice so changed by the disgust he felt that Youngblood never would have known it, even though Chicago Charlie had attempted no disguise.

A policeman was now on the scene, and the crowds, seeing that all had ended well, were again streaming along as if nothing unusual had happened.

Disgusted as he was Charlie saw that it would not do to offend Youngblood, for the chance of securing a situation might never again be so good.

"Can I not do something for you, if you will not accept money?" the sport asked, staring in some surprise. "You look as if—"

He hesitated to put the thought into words.

"I am in pretty hard straits, just now!" confessed the disguised detective. "I do not want pay for what I have done, but—"

"Well, out with it!" thrusting the bill back into the purse.

"If you could secure me a situation, now, where I might do something to earn a living, it wouldn't be bad. I've been out of a job so long that I hardly know what work looks like, but I think I could suit any employer who'd be willing to try me."

This was said with a little pitiful air of pleading.

Youngblood looked at him closely.

The two were standing at the horse's head, while the policeman seemed to be paying marked attention to the flushed and handsome Mrs. Solon Youngblood. No one was giving the speakers any heed.

"I'll tell you what!" and Youngblood lowered his voice. "I'm needing a man, now. A reliable man; one who can do his work and keep his tongue in his teeth. If you're that kind of a man, call around at my office in an hour."

He drew out a card and penciled the name and number on it.

"You'll find me there!"

Chicago Charlie saw he had been given the address of the Malcomb place!

The gallant policeman was assisting Mrs. Youngblood to re-enter the carriage.

Seeing this, the detective spliced the broken reins with a strong knot; and Youngblood, climbing in beside the woman, he gave the reins into the hands of the sport, and saw him drive away.

Fortune seemed once more to smile on him. Scarcely had his plans been perfected for entering Youngblood's service, when the desired opportunity had presented!

And to become Youngblood's private secretary!—for that was what he believed it to mean—he could not have asked for anything better!

Promptly at the expiration of the hour he was at the place appointed, and was ushered into a little room in the north wing of the building. It was a room which had been much used by John Malcomb, and in which Youngblood had established an office.

Notwithstanding its prosaic character, it was richly and luxuriously furnished. The writing desk, on which stood a typewriter, and where were many bunches of letters and papers, most attracted the detective's attention.

Youngblood came in directly.

"I want some one who is handy at correspondence and can get up a neat and effective letter, for I'm a little awkward at such things. There's a pile of letters there, that's been waiting an answer for a week, just because I haven't had the nerve to attack them."

Chicago Charlie saw that Youngblood was closely watching him.

Feeling secure in his disguise, he announced his readiness to begin work at once; and for an hour thereafter the two were closeted together, Youngblood dictating

short notes which he desired to have elaborated as replies to the letters.

Then he went out, leaving the detective to complete the work.

For a long time the typewriter sung under the detective's fingers.

Youngblood had promised to return, but, hearing nothing to indicate that he would soon do so, Chicago Charlie glanced anxiously at the papers arranged in pigeon-holes, wondering if any of them contained the clues he was seeking.

"It surely will be my own fault if I don't succeed now!" was his thought. "No man ever had a better chance given him."

But though he searched diligently, nothing of consequence was revealed.

Finally, as Youngblood still absented himself, he got up to go. There was no more work to be done that night, and no object could be served by remaining longer. He looked at his watch. It had already grown late.

Still wondering why Youngblood had not returned according to promise, he let himself out of the office.

As stated, the room so used was situated in the north wing of the building. A long corridor had to be traversed before the street door could be reached.

Chicago Charlie was moving thoughtfully along this corridor, his mind on Daisy Malcomb, when he became conscious that some one was near. He had heard nothing, but that indefinable feeling which sometimes comes, had swept over him.

Then his blood almost chilled in his veins.

A form that was the exact counterpart of John Malcomb came into view! It was moving from the north part of the building toward the eastern end!

Chicago Charlie stood rooted by a feeling akin to terror. He knew, so far as human knowledge could go, that the original of that shadow was in the land of spirits.

But for the fear that held him fixed he would have advanced to question the mysterious thing.

Less than a minute was the gruesome object in sight, the dim light of a lamp at the further end of the long hall sickly lighting it over and giving it occasionally a fantastic appearance.

Then it vanished, as mysteriously as it had come.

Charlie Clingstone, with that sense of awe still oppressing him, hurried to the point of disappearance. But nothing was to be seen. Nothing to indicate that any form of man or ghost had passed that way. Neither did a hasty search reveal anything.

A clammy sweat rested on his face and forehead. He was undeniably mystified and scared. He had never believed in such manifestations. Yet, if he had not seen the spirit of John Malcomb, what had he seen?

As nothing was to be gained by a further search, and not wishing to be found prying about the house thus in the night, he turned back along the corridor and descended to the street.

"My God!" was his almost inarticulate exclamation, as he wiped his dewy forehead. "I shall soon begin to think that I'm sure enough losing my mind. That couldn't have been John Malcomb; and yet—and yet—it was wonderfully like him! Who was it? What did it mean?"

CHAPTER XVII

PLOTS OF THE ENEMY.

On the second floor of a big building which was used partly for a machine shop and partly for a warehouse, a dozen men were congregated in a small dark room.

They were anxious-faced men, and seemed to have sought the place to avoid observation.

It was an interior room, with only a dirty skylight to let in the sunshine and air of the outer world. All about were scraps of old iron and miscellaneous odds and ends of rubbish. The floor was greasy and dirty, and even the chairs and table had the same appearance of grime.

Yet Solon Youngblood was there, clothed in his usual immaculate fashion. The slight form of Zel Magruder was also to be seen, crouched in a big chair.

More than ever on this occasion did Zel seem thin and weakly womanish.

He was recounting some adventures, to which his companions carefully listened.

"They'll be on your track for another murder, Zel Magruder!" Youngblood sharply commented. "You're getting reckless!"

"Well, what was I to do?" Zel demanded, in no pleasant tone. "The young brat was a-follerin' me an' a-tryin' to find out where I was goin'. If he'd 'a' done so, you fellers would likely be in limbo purty quick. I tried to knock him into the water with the oar; and, when he grabbed it and hung on like a bull-dog, I shot him. The police be blowed! How are they ever to know who done it?"

"If it had only been the other one, Zel!" Youngblood's voice rasped and his eyes took on a heated light.

"If you'd only knocked that Columbian Detective over that way, I'd move that the band give you a gold medal! But, I think I've got him, now!"

He smoothed his chin reflectively and stared at the dirty floor.

Two or three of the band eagerly drew closer.

He laughed; then rising, rapped with his knuckles on the table for order.

"I'll tell you all about it later, boys. Business first, then pleasure. The treasurer will make a report concerning that last lot of goods."

It was the same evening, and almost at the same hour, that Chicago Charlie, standing in the corridor of the Malcomb house, fancied he must have seen the spirit of John Malcomb.

The "goods," as was quickly shown, were a part of the cargo whose coming had been spoken of by Magruder. The treasurer's report showed of what they had consisted and of how they had been disposed. One item touched Magruder, and he arose to explain:

"I hain't been able to do so much, sense old Nell got the idee into her head that we'd better pull out o' the biz. Before that, she was the rankest o' the lot, in favor o' handlin' any kind o' stuff that brought in money. I guess she got skeered. Anyway, she's been advisin' the band to let the thing alone, an' she's been givin' it to me hot and heavy, because I don't pay any 'tention to what she says!"

"Your people got away with the silks, didn't they?" Youngblood frowningly questioned.

"Yes, but I couldn't git 'em to push the sale o' the jew'ry! Nell wouldn't touch anything with a hot poker, and them that she had influence over wouldn't either. I'm afraid we can't handle as much o' the truck as we did once."

Youngblood was not pleased with the statement.

"What was done with the other lot of watches and diamonds?" he growled.

"Old Jake Wolfstein is shovin' them out for us as fast as he can."

Wolfstein was a man long suspected of being a "fence" for thieves; but though his place of business—which showed in front of it the three gilt balls of the pawnbroker—had been more than once searched, no stolen goods had ever been found in his possession. He was one of the shrewdest men of his class in the entire city.

"If the Gypsies go back on us we'll have to turn everything over to Wolfstein," Youngblood muttered, "though I'd hate to do it, for he charges such an all-fired commission. He's never satisfied with his five-hundred 'pershent,' but wants it all!"

He knew, however, that Wolfstein was indispensable to him, and that he would have to allow any percent the old cormorant demanded.

"Now I'll tell you what I hinted at awhile ago."

Youngblood settled back in his chair, and smiled wolfishly.

The business of the meeting appeared to be ended; and the reports, with the exception of that made by Magruder, had seemed satisfactory.

The band had not been so quiet and secretive on this evening as on that other when Chicago Charlie had watched them. No doubt they felt safer from intrusion and espionage. They had worn no masks.

The fact that they had changed their place of meeting may have accounted for this stronger feeling of security.

The men drew their chairs about Youngblood, evincing the liveliest interest. It was not often their chief took the trouble to communicate to them his plans or discoveries. As a usual thing, he gave his orders and they obeyed. He was the directing brain; they were the muscles of the organization.

"I have warned you many times, as you will remember, to be on your guard against the disguises of the man who is becoming known as Chicago Charlie, the Columbian Detective; but when I did so I never thought I'd be myself taken in by him. Yet I was, in a most glorious shape; and this very evening. He's my private secretary!"

The men looked incredulous, and Youngblood, noting their startled glances, laughed aloud—a roaring, jolly laugh that caused them to stare more than ever.

Then, still laughing, he proceeded to relate how Chicago Charlie had deceived and "taken him in."

"Do you know, his disguise was so perfect that I never dreamed but that the scamp was a stranger!" he averred. "And I never suspected anything until he called at the house an hour afterward. Likely I then had my wits about me a little better, for I was a good deal rattled by that runaway."

"Something in his voice—something that sounded familiar—caused me to watch him. Disguising the voice is the hardest thing to do in the world. A man may change the color of his face, and put on different clothes, and even wear wigs and mustaches. But, unless he's particularly skillful, whenever he tries to alter his voice it takes on a husky sound that betrays him."

"I began to notice his voice, and then I saw that his complexion wasn't natural;—that he'd used some kind of tan. And when I continued to study him, with my suspicions thus aroused, I soon saw who the man was."

"If he'd been looking at me the time the knowledge came to me, he'd have seen the thing in my face. But he wasn't looking; and I continued to dictate the letter, just as if nothing had happened."

"Why didn't you kill the bound then and there?" one fierce-eyed fellow demanded.

"Which goes to show what a brainy fellow you are, Swipesey!" was the sarcastic retort; under which Swipesey collapsed utterly.

"No! it wouldn't have done to strike, then. No more am I ready to strike now. But by coming into my own house that way, he has put himself into my power. I shall let him go on fancying that he's playing it cute and deceiving me in the very worst way, until I get ready to dispose of the scoundrel."

"Why! he even went through some of my papers, to-night, and was amusing himself that way when I left to come here. Don't you see that I can put him on more false scents in a week than he can follow up in a month."

He rubbed his hands gleefully, and smiled back at the beaming faces about him.

The Lakeside League ever stood ready to swear by their chief, but never more so than now. They were a brainless lot of scoundrels, the most of them, and worshiped in another intellect and finesse they did not themselves possess.

"Just let him go on!" and Youngblood nodded his head sagely. "I'll give him enough rope and see him hang himself. It will, maybe, save us a more disagreeable job."

"If 'twas me, I'd put a knife inter 'im some dark night!" Swipesey growled, not pleased with the way he had been sat on. "Sich cattle are a good deal safer out o' the way;—that's my notion!"

"Maybe I'll give you the contract for doing that same, yet!" was the smiling reply. "I think I've got him, though!"

With this he got up, indicating he had said all he meant to say, and moved toward the door; but the Leaguers, grouping themselves in twos and threes, continued to talk of what the chief had just told them.

They were afraid of the Columbian Detective, and their words and actions showed it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCHING.

No man could possibly have been more surprised than Chicago Charlie would have

been had he known the subject of the conversation in that little upper room.

He believed himself perfectly secure, never once dreaming that his disguise had been penetrated by the keen-eyed man he had set out to watch.

Neither had he any occasion to change this opinion, as the days glided by; and two days later, having finished his task and seen Solon Youngblood leave the office, he was still resting in the pleasant belief with which he had all along beguiled himself.

His thoughts, as he sat there, comfortably tilted back in the office chair, were on Youngblood, on Daisy Malcomb, and on the shadowy figure so remarkably resembling John Malcomb.

The figure had not again appeared, or at any rate had not again been seen by the detective.

And Charlie was almost ready to think he had been the victim of some optical illusion.

His reason told him that he had not seen Malcomb. Nothing, he fancied, could make him think that. Had he not seen Malcomb lying dead in his own office, bathed in blood? Pshaw! he put the idea from him as being supremely silly.

Still, he could not shake off the feeling that had held him chained that night, when he stood face to face with the spectral thing. Spirit or man, the sight of it had given him such a chill as he would not soon forget.

Sure it could not have been Malcomb, and unwilling to believe he had seen nothing at all, he turned to the only other tenable theories: What he saw must have been a man disguised to look like Malcomb, or one who naturally much resembled the dead man.

This was unsatisfactory enough—and did not answer the question of what Malcomb's double had been doing there that night!—but it was the best he could do.

The seeing of the ghostly thing had had one good effect. It had taken his mind somewhat away from its recent unhealthy brooding. Still, when the eyes of Youngblood were not known to be on him, a look of anguish often swept over his face.

Since the receipt of Daisy's letter, he had scarcely taken time to sleep, all the hours in which he could be away from the office being given up to a vain search for her. He had sought for her everywhere.

Only that morning, learning that the body of a young woman had been taken to the morgue, he had gone thither filled with the most distressing fears.

Each day a similar report had drawn him to that terrible place of the dead.

The almost insane tone of the letter led him to anticipate her suicide.

With his mind thus running from one thing to another, he took the letter from his pocket and gave it another careful study. He had done that probably a hundred times, until he knew every word and sentence, and could even see the curves of the letters without glancing at them. Nevertheless, he read it over with as much avidity as if it had been just received.

It told him no more than he already knew. Of her own accord she had disappeared, leaving neither trace nor clue, and warning him of the uselessness of trying to find where she had gone.

When he had read it over and over he put it up again; and his day's work being ended, left the office and went out into the street.

There was ease for his wounded spirit in the rushing, bustling atmosphere of the great western metropolis. The sight of these hurrying thousands, each on his own interest intent, conveyed a lesson to a thoughtful man.

It revealed the fact—sometimes an unpleasant fact—that among these myriad he was of little more consequence than an ant in a struggling ant-hill. He might die and pass away, and few indeed would there be to mourn or remember him.

Rapt in such reflections, Charlie Clingstone walked on and on, along the familiar streets, entering neither cab nor car, until the dusk of coming night was about him.

He had not guided his footsteps, but permitted them to wander whithersoever they would.

Suddenly he was aroused by a voice, that seemed hoarsely in his ear:

"Hey, shipmate! Off your cruising ground, ain't ye?"

A rough hand caught him by the arm. Looking about he beheld the beaming face of Jack Rackstraw.

At Rackstraw's heels trudged the newsboy, a shadow on his smiling face.

"What news?" Clingstone questioned, knowing by their looks they had something to communicate.

"It's the Infant Wonder!" Billy exclaimed. "She's been a-lickin' of him."

"Who?" the detective questioned, finding it difficult to at once adjust himself to their thoughts.

"Why, the Holy Terror!" cried Rackstraw, with ready indignation. "That there termagant that calls herself Mrs. Susan Tonguegrass. Mrs. Sourtongue would be a heap sight better. We ketch'd her at it! An' the Infant, he was a-howlin' jist tremen-jus."

"We packed him off home; and then I sot out and filed a complaint instanter ag'inst the Holy Terror, an' I think she'll be a-huntin' up another herd of infants by to-morrow."

"From what the leader of the Alphabet Society said I reckon she'll git the bounce, for it wasn't the first complaint that had been put in ag'in' her."

Chicago Charlie turned toward a restaurant.

"We'll go in here," he said, "and talk it over."

A happy fate seemed to direct his footsteps, for the girl who came forward to take their orders was an old acquaintance. She had been one of the John Malcomb servants!

Ever since the time of the discovery that Youngblood had taken possession of the house, Chicago Charlie had kept a sharp lookout for some of these servants, but this was the first one he had met.

"You don't know how glad I am to meet you!" he exclaimed, cordially, putting out a hand.

She drew back in alarm. Chicago Charlie, absorbed in the pleasure of seeing her, had forgotten his disguise, and committed a most egregious blunder.

He saw that she was both puzzled and alarmed, no doubt because of the strangeness of the face and the familiar intonations of the voice.

Rackstraw and Billy Stubbs, who had not been troubled by the detective's disguise, as they had known of it, seemed stupefied, fearing an unpleasant disclosure.

"Bring us something to eat and I'll explain everything," the detective urged, observing that the actions of the girl were attracting attention. "You'll know me well enough when I tell you who I am."

The girl was visibly agitated, but hurried away, nevertheless; returning soon with some hot rolls and butter and some steaming coffee.

"You still don't know me, I see," Clingstone laughingly whispered, as she placed the things on the table. "I'm your old friend, Charlie Clingstone."

She started incredulously at first; but seeing that it must be the truth, for she could not deny that the voice was Clingstone's, she gave him a friendly glance, declaring:

"You almost frightened me to death. Why are you fixed out that way? Going to a masquerade?"

He did not reply to this; but asked, with quick eagerness:

"Can you tell me what has become of Daisy Malcomb?"

"Indeed I cannot! The Youngbloods came and took possession of the house and told me that my services would be no longer needed. All the others were treated the same way."

"And Daisy?"

"I don't know where she went, nor when. She was not to be found, when the Youngbloods came there."

There were but few people in the restaurant, and, seeing that her services would not be in immediate demand, he urged her to take one of the chairs.

"I have something to say to you! Do you like your place here?"

"Not if I could get better. I've got to do something, though!"

Then he told her the story narrated to him by Rackstraw and Billy Stubbs.

"If you think you'd like that place I believe it can be obtained for you. I'll have the inspector recommend your appointment."

She smiled and showed her white, even teeth.

She was a handsome girl, with an intelligent face and a bright and winning manner; and Jack Rackstraw, the grizzled, lake sailor, viewed her with undisguised admiration.

"The pay will be better, I feel sure!" Chicago Charlie averred, taking a notebook and pencil from his pocket. "If you will say the word, I will write to the inspector right now."

It was evident that he desired her to have the situation, and Billy Stubbs was immensely tickled at the prospect. Billy felt that in the hands of this friend of Chicago Charlie, the Infant Wonder would be perfectly safe.

"What do you say?" and the detective poised his pencil as he looked at her.

She nodded.

"I'll try it; for I don't like this place the least bit. Too many rough men come in here!"

"I'll mail this for you as soon as we go out!" he said, when he had written and folded the note.

Then he again fell to discussing the probable whereabouts of Daisy Malcomb.

The next morning Miss Lilly Lilac—for that was the girl's name—was notified that the position rendered vacant by the resignation of Mrs. Susan Tonguegrass was hers if she would accept it, and a liberal salary was named as the recompense for her services.

CHAPTER XIX.

LED INTO A TRAP.

RACKSTRAW and Billy Stubbs went away together, congratulating themselves on the future prospects of the Infant Wonder, and Chicago Charlie continued his perambulations.

Arriving at his room, two or three hours later, he found a newsboy awaiting him.

The newsboy carried a letter, which he immediately put into the detective's hand.

"It's from Billy Stubbs," he explained. "He said for me to give you this and to tell yer to come quick. He couldn't leave."

Having delivered the letter and the statement, the boy gave a respectful pull at his frowzy foretop, and disappeared.

The letter was a badly-spelled scrawl, but it held startling information.

Billy, in his wanderings, had discovered Daisy Malcomb's hiding-place.

The note ran thus:

cHicaGO cHarley. i Hav fOU'n Out wHUr DaZy iZ. sHe iS in tHe Old HOuSE At a HundErD an Ate ——— AvEnOO SHE cAnT giT AWAY iM gOI'n too StAy aN WACH HER tIll yeW COMe COMe RiTe Of Billy StUBBs

The blank shown in the copy was filled with a name, which it would be impolitic to insert here.

Charlie stared at the scrawl in amazement. Then he thrust the note into his pocket, and turned back into the street.

If Daisy was held at the place given he would find her and have speech with her, if nothing else. She had not desired him to follow her, but he would follow her, nevertheless.

Billy's note stated that she was held in the house. Else, what did he mean by saying she could not get away. Manifestly, she had encountered enemies, against whom she had found it impossible to fight.

Whatever might be the trouble, he would go at once, and do what he could—or whatever she would permit him to do—to aid her.

He knew the site of the old house well. It was in a locality similar to that in which he had watched the meeting of the Lakeside Leaguers. She must indeed be in dire straits, to be found in such a place.

With these thoughts whirling in his mind, he stopped short.

The thought had come to him that this

might be but a lure of enemies to lead him into a trap. He was not acquainted with the scrawling chirography of the newsboy, Billy Stubbs. He had never even thought to ask Billy if he could write, taking it for granted that he could, for he knew Billy could read well enough to spell out the news in the papers.

His head whirled as he stopped thus bewilderedly, with that fear suddenly pressing in on him.

If this were a trap set for him, and which it was expected he would walk straight into, there could be but one conclusion from it: his disguise had been penetrated.

He recalled, with some feeling of pride, the manner in which Lilly Lilac had stared at him in the restaurant. This was good evidence that his disguise was excellent. He was loth to believe that it had been seen through.

Only for a few moments did he halt in indecision.

His resolve was quickly taken.

Stepping to the nearest telephone station, he put himself in communication with the Inspector of Police.

Happily the inspector was in his office, and Chicago Charlie could pour his story into the ears of the man he most desired to hear it.

He told the inspector of the communication he had received, gave him the name of the avenue and number of the building, and spoke of his fears of a trap.

"Go ahead!" was the reply. "We'll see that the trappers are trapped!"

Thus reassured, Chicago Charlie took the car of the line passing nearest to the old house; and in less than a half hour thereafter stood in the dark street before the forbidding building.

There was nothing about it to indicate that it was inhabited. No friendly lamp or gas-jet poured its light through the windows. No sounds came from behind its closed doors.

"Looks more than ever like a trap!" he mused, running his eyes over the house. "It would be a bad place up there to get into trouble. I'm afraid the inspector's friends couldn't get to me soon enough to be of much assistance."

Nevertheless, the thought that Daisy Malcomb *might* be screened somewhere behind those dingy brick walls, stirred him anew. He felt that he would go through fire, should that ever be necessary, to rescue or aid her.

Circling the building, and watching closely against any sign of treachery, he sought carefully for some place by which he might enter.

He was wondering why he did not see Billy Stubbs, if the boy had really sent the note; and was becoming more and more convinced that an effort was being made to trap him, when a boyish voice whispered down from the gloom.

"Slip this here way. She's above stairs here."

Chicago Charlie turned in that direction, with his hand on his revolver.

He was not yet satisfied that all was as it should be. The voice had sounded remarkably like Billy's, but the words had been so whispered that it was difficult to be certain of this.

"Is that you, Billy Stubbs?" he ventured to call.

No reply came, and he knew the boy had turned back into the house.

Stumbling forward, he found some rickety steps, leading up to a door wherein the boy must have stood.

He mounted these, with his hand still on his weapon.

The feeling that treachery was afoot was strong on him.

The door stood slightly ajar, and he pushed on into the house.

All was dark as Erebus.

There seemed to be a wide hallway, penetrating he knew not whither.

He whispered again to the boy; and, receiving no reply, and with the conviction still growing that evil was meant, he drew out and cocked the pistol, and took another step.

Instantly he felt himself plunging downward through the gloom. The rotten floor, or a portion of it, had been removed.

A wild cry of alarm and fear arose from the gloom.

Then Chicago Charlie struck among a heap of rubbish, and remained silent and senseless.

Again the boy whispered:

"Pards, we've got 'im!"

CHAPTER XX.

BILLY STUBBS AS A WILD RIDER.

Even though Billy Stubbs had not found Daisy Malcomb as stated by the false letter, he was not idle. The special work given to him by Chicago Charlie was the shadowing of Zel Magruder; and, even while Chicago Charlie was plunging downward to seeming death in the old house, the keen-eyed newsboy was lying in the shadows of the Gypsy tents.

He had seen Magruder enter one of them and was thinking of worming his way to a better position, when the Gypsy came out ions and walked away into the gloom.

Billy followed with stealthy footsteps, and was somewhat surprised when he saw Zel turn toward Buffalo Bill's Wild West, which was giving daily and nightly exhibitions at Sixty-second and Sixty-third streets.

Instead of going toward the entrance that was nearest, Zel Magruder veered off; and, after making a wide circle, approached the stables.

There was a small door there, used only by employees, and which was commonly to be found locked. Whether Zel found it open or managed to undo the fastenings, Billy did not know; but he nevertheless saw the Gypsy pass through.

This was a disappointment, for the newsboy feared he was now to lose track of him.

But, after creeping up to the door, he saw that Zel had only pushed it to, and had not fastened it.

Hence he crowded in, determined to go wherever Zel went, if he could possibly do it without discovery.

There were horses and men all about, and the place where he found himself, though dimly lighted, was not gloomy enough to make him feel at ease.

A couple of Mexicans were standing out far off, hurling their lassoes at various inanimate objects, and a Uhlan guard was striking up a conversation with a Cossack.

Billy was bewildered by all he saw and heard, and for the moment almost forgot the object of his errand.

Then he looked around for Zel Magruder.

He did not see him at first, but an instant later he caught sight of the Gypsy stealing along in the shadow of the wall.

It was plain Magruder's presence was unknown to the men whom Billy saw about.

"Whatever is the Gypsy up to?" was his mental query.

Magruder was getting further and further away, advancing as if he meant to force his way into the very arena itself.

The exhibition was in full blast. Annie Oakley had given splendid illustration of her dexterity in the use of fire-arms; and now the gathered thousands were wildly cheering the horse races between cowboy, Cossack, Mexican and others, on their native steeds.

Magruder halted, crouching in the gloom until the races were at an end, and Billy Stubbs, with his curiosity worked to fever pitch, kept on until he was perilously near the Gypsy!

The air was still resounding with the plaudits of the multitude, and preparations were going forward for the introduction of the Pony Express, when Magruder, turning in Billy's direction, discovered the boy, who was staring at him from beneath an awning.

With an oath, Magruder flashed out a knife and dashed at him, his intentions being murderous, for Magruder was thoroughly reckless when aroused.

Billy sprang back with a cry of fear, almost falling headlong over some object on the ground.

A broncho, saddled and bridled, stood near.

What induced the scared boy to perform the next act, he could not have told, unless it was his insane desire to get away from that gleaming knife. Almost before he knew it he was on the back of the broncho, clambering into the saddle for safety, as he would

have mounted into a tree if pursued by a bear.

The startled broncho gave a bound, that bore Billy out of reach of the threatening knife, and at the same time hurled him into what seemed likely to be new perils.

The little beast had been half asleep, when Billy bestrode him in that unceremonious fashion; and, seeing the glaring lights and hearing the applauding shouts, doubtless thought the time had arrived for an exhibition of his running and bucking qualities.

Almost before Billy knew what the broncho meant to do, he found himself the central attraction of the big show!

The sight of those tiers of faces in a measure brought back his wits, and, though terribly scared by what had occurred and much dreading the consequences, he saw that the best thing he could do was to cling to the back of the broncho.

The little brute was tearing along like mad, and the spectators, thinking this a new feature of the exhibition, were, many of them, shouting in their usual boisterous fashion.

The programme said nothing of a wild broncho from the untamed West being ridden by a tatterdemalion boy; but they accepted it as one of the good things which Buffalo Bill sometimes introduced without previous announcement.

The managers and employees of the Wild West were thunderstruck. They knew not what to make of this sudden appearance, and for a minute stood in speechless amazement.

Doubtless they would have interfered shortly, but the broncho, rearing and plunging wildly, began to prance and buck. The way in which Billy clung to the back of the bounding pony assured them that fun was in store for the multitude; and so they stayed their hands, alert, in case the boy should need help.

Fright, and a feeling that he must hold on or be killed, made of Billy Stubbs a most marvelous rough rider. He set his teeth hard, dug one hand into the broncho's mane and with the other clasped the high pommel, screwed his heels into the broncho's sides, and held on for dear life.

There was never a worse scared boy than was Billy Stubbs for a few minutes. The broncho vaulted, pranced, pitched and bucked, in the most approved fashion;—the applause of the audience rose hysterically;—the cowboys stared their wonderment;—and Billy gripped the saddle like grim death.

Then the broncho, discovering that the reins were hanging idly, bolted wildly out of the arena.

It was all over in less than five minutes, and Billy Stubbs was back again at the point from whence he had started.

He heard men hurrying toward him.

Zel Magruder was nowhere to be seen.

But Billy Stubbs thought little enough of Zel Magruder just then.

He heard those pattering steps; and, anticipating condign punishment, freed himself as quickly as he could, and darted away.

Like a rat he scudded through the shadows, and, finding the door by which he had entered, he slipped out into the night.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN A QUEER PRISON.

ONE of the witnesses of Billy's miraculous performance, was his friend Jack Rackstraw.

Rackstraw, having been left to his own devices and finding time hanging heavily on his hands, had resolved to "take in" the Wild West exhibition, and was in one of the front tiers of seats, when Billy dashed in unceremoniously.

Rackstraw was never more astounded in his life, than when he saw his boy chum on the back of the pitching broncho. He could only stare and give vent to his astonishment in whispered exclamations. For the moment he could not believe his eyes; yet a second look told him that it was sure enough Billy Stubbs.

"Blast me!" what'll that boy be up to next? How did he git onto that ferocious brute, anyway!"

When the broncho had reached the climax of its wild antics, and Rackstraw expected every minute to see Billy hurled to the earth or crushed to a bleeding mass, he rose with the firm intention of hurrying to the boy's rescue.

But a hand on his shoulder checked him.

"Sit down!" growled a voice. "Do ye think nobody else wants to see?"

Rackstraw sunk helplessly back. His better judgment told him he could do nothing, and that if Billy was to be killed he must be killed.

But he muttered:

"Drat the imp! I reckon I'll have to cow-hide him fer that."

His mind was still in a bewildered whirl when the broncho vanished with Billy still clinging to his back.

Then, feeling shaky in every limb, Rackstraw climbed down and made his way toward the entrance through which the broncho and boy had passed.

A man barred his way.

"No coming in here, sir!" was the declaration.

"What's become of that boy?" Jack howled.

The man, who was only an employee, and who was as much puzzled as the sailor, growled back:

"Plague take the boy! I don't know where he came from nor where he's gone. He's knocked the programme endwise and set everything wild!"

Rackstraw glared at him wrathfully, then stumped furiously away, and was soon after outside of the big show, with the night wind whistling about and the stars shining down on him.

Making his way now as best he could along the outside toward the point where the stables were located, he stopped at each advance of a dozen steps and watched and listened.

A crouching form hurried toward him.

"Oh, Jack! is that you?"

The voice was Billy's.

"You young hound!" and Rackstraw gripped him by the collar and churned him up and down. "What do you mean by such cantankerin'? How did ye git on the back o' that there hoss?"

"Come on," Billy whispered, "let's git away from here."

Rackstraw was no more anxious to have Billy arrested than was Billy to be arrested, and, though he was as much mystified as ever, he suffered the boy to lead him away.

"Now see here, you young rascal!" he grumbled, when they were in the neighborhood of the high fence inclosing the Exposition buildings. "I ain't a-goin a step furdur until I know more'n I do at this instant. Where air you goin' and whatever have you been up to?"

Billy Stubbs, with the fear of the Wild West men still strong on him, halted and gave Rackstraw a hurried explanation.

The sailor snorted, but with surprise more than disgust.

"It was jist like you, young feller. Some o' these nights you'll go off smilin' an' come back froze up in an ice box. Well, if you do you needn't blame me!"

"I'm sorry I lost Magruder," Billy observed, still shaking from his recent excitement.

"An' I'm sorry I lost that show. Reckon now, you wouldn't care to go back with me an' see it out?"

"No! no!"

Billy clung to his hand almost fiercely.

"All right, then!" looking down with eyes that held a softened light.

He would have said more, but a form slipped stealthily by them, which they saw to be Magruder's.

Magruder seemed equally anxious to give the Wild West exhibition a wide berth. He was now hastening toward the Fairgrounds.

Billy pulled at Rackstraw's hand and drew the sailor along in the Gypsy's wake.

They soon lost the Gypsy, however, for the latter was moving at a good gait.

Satisfied that he had found entrance into the grounds, or would soon do so, they also went in; and for a long time strolled about, looking vainly for him.

The time was growing late, and it seemed unlikely they would get to see Magruder again that night. The people had nearly all

departed, though the guides and guards still hung about, and there was a considerable amount of activity in all the buildings.

They sought the Cairo street, with no better success, and turned back into the grounds and approached the lagoon. A few gondoliers were still visible, hoping to yet take in a fare.

"They hain't no use lookin' any furdur this night!" Rackstraw averred. "I'm going over to the Andy Johnson an' see if I can't git a good sleep once more. Can't seem to sleep as well as I ought in these hotels and the like. An' you, young'un, air a-goin' along with me!"

He linked his arm into Billy's, as he half feared the boy would rebel and break away, and together they walked past the Horticultural Building, and on toward the bridge leading to the beautiful wooded island surrounded by its lagoon.

Billy went willingly enough, for, though loth to give up the search, he saw that he could accomplish nothing by a longer stay, and was, besides, thoroughly beat out by his experiences of the night.

They never dreamed of danger, as they turned from the wooded island toward the smaller island, containing the Hunter's Camp. The scene was like a bit out of fairy land, so smiling and peaceful was it under the light of the electric lamps. The shadows of the low trees and bushes were reflected in black masses in the water; and where the shrubbery intercepted the light, there were dark and romantic places, resembling hidden de'ls.

They had scarcely set foot on the little island when three or four men leaped out of the shadows and beset them.

Rackstraw knocked one of the rascals down at the first blow; but this seemed not to frighten the others, who lunged at him with knives.

It was a most dare-devil attack, considering the time and place.

The assailants were dark-visaged fellows, much resembling those who had attacked Chicago Charlie several nights before near the Javanese village in Midway Plaisance.

Neither Rackstraw nor Billy thought of this, at the time, though they had been told of the attack by Chicago Charlie and been warned to be on the lookout for these scamps.

Jackstraw was armed with a small pistol, but, disliking to use it, he again struck out fiercely, catching one of the fellows under the jaw.

But the one he had previously knocked down, was up and coming at him again.

"Slide out, boy!" he whispered, turning to Billy, whom he had placed protectingly behind him. "They're determined to slice us up! Pull out, I'll foller ye!"

Billy, who was thoroughly alarmed by the fierceness of the attack, obeyed this sound advice, running lightly out on the bridge.

There seemed to be other forms moving in the bushes, as if more black-browed men were hurrying up, and Jack Rackstraw, menacingly waving his pistol, followed the boy.

Not much noise had been made in the short struggle, but it had reached some of the guards, who were now seen to be hurrying thither.

Rackstraw saw these guards coming, and became aware, too, that the attacking force had as suddenly vanished.

A black look came to his face.

He saw clearly what had been attempted. Whoever the assailants were—whether friends of Zel Magruder or not—they had striven to waylay the sailor and his boy chum, and had chosen the island as offering the most favorable point.

Doubtless they had thought to slay the two there and toss the bodies into the lagoon. Found thus, gashed with knives, there would have been a sensation, it is true, but not much chance of discovering the guilty parties.

Seeing that his enemies no longer threatened him, Rackstraw turned to follow Billy Stubbs, but was surprised to observe that the boy had disappeared.

Billy in fleeing across the bridge in advance of Rackstraw, had seen a man on the opposite shore, whom he took to be one of the sailing party.

Therefore, as soon as his feet left the

bridge, he turned sharply, and ran rapidly and silently, convinced that Rackstraw was abundantly able to take care of himself and sure the sailor would follow him almost immediately. So he ran on for some distance, scarcely looking back.

When he came to a halt at length, it was in the shadow of the big 120-ton Krupp gun, which had not yet been moved into the building devoted to the Krupp Gun Exhibit.

This monster cannon, the largest ever manufactured, towered above the boy like an immense redwood log from a Californian forest.

Billy, listening and waiting for the coming of Rackstraw, was startled by a sound of light footsteps.

The footsteps were probably those of a peaceful passer-by, but the gamin, being in an extremely nervous state, attributed them to the advance of foes, and cast about for a place of concealment.

Nothing offered but the yawning mouth of the big cannon.

It was like crawling down into the wide-open jaws of death, to enter that black opening; but Billy Stubbs climbed up to it and slid into the big hole feet foremost.

"What if the thing should be loaded, and should go off!" was his scared thought.

Nevertheless, being already in the maw of the monster, he did not deem it wise to crawl out, and reflection soon convinced him that he was in no danger from an explosion of the gun—for it would never have been brought in there loaded to threaten human lives and the safety of the buildings.

The interior of the big gun was not an uncomfortable place, as he found, when his fears had subsided.

He began to wonder, though, how Jack Rackstraw was to find him there, and, when no further alarming sound came to disturb him, he was on the point of creeping out to look for that redoubtable individual.

Then there came again the tread of footsteps, combined with low-spoken words, and Billy knew that a number of men had advanced and were grouped near the cannon's mouth.

Then he heard them mounting, by a step-ladder or in some manner; heard their talk grow louder; and then the brightness of the electric lights suddenly disappeared, leaving him in total darkness.

An iron cap had been placed over the cannon's mouth, and Billy Stubbs was a prisoner!

CHAPTER XXII.

BILLY AS A HERO.

A SENSE of deep fear smote the newsboy, when he realized that he had been thus imprisoned. His natural thought was that it had been the act of the men who had attacked him and Rackstraw on the island.

Feeling thus, he remained perfectly quiet, until sure the men had departed. Even then he did no more than stir for some time, not knowing but they might come back.

That they were a desperate lot, he had had ample proof.

"This hyer's a go!" he soliloquized, twisting uneasily in his strange prison. "I never thought to get caught, when I climbed up hyer. It's almost as bad as the horse in the Wild West!"

Truly his experiences of the night had been far from pleasant!

The minutes crept by with feet of lead. The men did not return, nor could he hear Rackstraw's voice calling to him, as he had half hoped he might. The air became close, and he wondered if he would be forced to remain in there until he smothered.

The minutes lengthened into an hour. Still Rackstraw did not come.

The Exposition grounds grew strangely quiet. The change struck him strongly, for usually the stillness was not remarkable. He believed that even the guards had sought their rest.

Billy could endure it no longer. He crawled to the cannon's mouth and placed his hands against the cap that excluded the light and air. It seemed as immovable as the Cheops Pyramid. Pushing against it with head and hands did not stir it from its place.

He groaned aloud; then, becoming frightened, shouted for help.

His voice within that confined space, seemed thrown back on him in muffled waves. He was sure it did not penetrate to any distance.

Nevertheless, he called again and again, pitching his tones to a shriek, as the thought that he was buried there alive grew firmer and stronger.

It was no use beating his head against the cannon's cap, and it appeared to be quite as useless to waste his breath and strength in this sort of shouting. But he could not forbear, and again and again screamed his fear at the echoing steel.

No one came in answer to his calls; and, thoroughly cowed and almost exhausted, he remained quiet after a time, convinced that help could not come to him.

He blamed himself for abandoning Rackstraw. This would not have occurred, if he had kept close to Rackstraw's side! He almost felt that he was being justly punished for leaving Rackstraw to face their foes alone. He told himself that the act, performed in fear, had been cowardly, even though Rackstraw had urged it.

Altogether, the newsboy never spent more miserable hours than those he passed shut up in the big Krupp cannon.

But day came at last, when it seemed to the weary newsboy that it never would come.

The electric lights burnt themselves out in the rays of the rising sun; though it was not this fact that made Billy Stubbs aware of the arrival of daylight. It was the hum of voices of early risers.

None of them passed near the big gun, and so did not hear the calls that Billy again began to send up.

He longed intensely to be released, and yet feared the result. What would be said and done to him when he should be found in there? Would he be punished or placed under arrest?

His calls ceased, as the dread of this pressed on him.

Then again he heard voices—the same, he was sure, he had heard when the cap had been placed over the mouth of the cannon.

He held his breath in suspense.

He could tell that the men were climbing up, as before.

Then the cap was taken away and the sunlight and air poured in.

Billy Stubbs crouched in his prison like a spaniel expecting castigation.

But the men, who were employees of the Krupp Gun Company, instead of looking in, walked away.

The newsboy crept to the opening and peered out.

There was no one near; no one apparently looking in his direction. With his pulses thrilling, and feeling that this was his golden opportunity, he crept out still further, clutched the rim of the cannon's mouth with his hands and dropped lightly to the ground.

He glanced fearfully about.

No one had observed him; and, feeling that he had made a miraculous escape, he hastened away as rapidly as possible, endeavoring to assume a nonchalant air.

Though the hour was early, men and women were already to be seen moving about the buildings, and Billy realized that it was high time he had his supply of morning papers. Usually he was distributing them at that hour.

A train of the Illinois Central Railway, engaged in the business of carrying excursionists to and from the grounds, was ready to pull out for the city.

He deemed it not wise to make any search for Rackstraw at that time.

"I reckon he's safe enough aboard the Andy Johnson!" was his inward comment.

He could see the funnels of the steamer, from where he stood—the steamer lying at anchor near the pier.

There was little time for reflection. Rackstraw had always shown himself abundantly able to look out for number one. Therefore, certain that his sailor friend had come all right through the difficulties of the night, Billy Stubbs hurried aboard the train.

It pulled out almost at the same moment, going to the city nearly empty.

In a remarkably short space of time, Billy returned by the same way, laden with his supply of papers.

He glanced over one of them, while making the run to the Exposition grounds.

A lot of startling headlines riveted his attention:

"ROUGH RIDING!"

THE WILD WEST ASTONISHED!

A WONDERFUL PERFORMANCE NOT DOWN ON THE BILLS!

How the Auditors of 'Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders' Were Given a Genuine Sensation.

"The people who went to see the performance given at Buffalo Bill's Wild West last night, were treated to a bit of rough riding for which they had not come prepared. The races had gone off as usual, marked by their customary success; and then came the event of the evening.

"The Pony Express act was in course of preparation, it being the next thing on the programme, when a roughly-dressed boy, but one showing in his every movement that he was a most skillful rider, dashed in, mounted on the most vicious of the bucking bronchos.

"For a moment, those who had been looking for something else stared. But the performance then given was good enough to atone for the absence of the Pony Express act. The broncho pranced and plunged, but his utmost skill was not able to hurl the young centaur from his back. Time and again did the pony take those wild leaps. It is doubtful if any but the best of the cowboys could have held a seat on him. Yet the boy remained as firmly in the saddle as if he were part and parcel of it.

"Buffalo Bill and Nate Salsbury were as much astounded as any. Where the boy had come from and who he was seemed unknown. Then, as an explanation, one of the cowboys whispered aloud the secret.

"The young rough rider, who had taken this singular way of introducing himself, was none other than Gunnison George, celebrated throughout the Rocky Mountain region as the most dare-devil horseman and broncho-buster ever known in the West. Although but a boy in years, it seems that Gunnison George has attained his celebrity through genuine merit. Last season he rode in the famous trick race against Sage-Bush Sweeney, and beat Sweeney at every point; and the year before, when only sixteen years old, he broke and subdued for the Farnham Brothers, of the Texas Panhandle, a herd of as wild and vicious bronchos as ever roamed the cactus stretches of the great Staked Plains."

There was more of the same sort, nearly a column of it. Either the enterprising reporter had given free rein to his exuberant imagination, or some one had "filled him full of fairy stories."

Billy Stubbs stared as if his eyes would pop out of his head.

"Gunnison George!" he gasped, holding the paper limply in his hands and looking bewilderedly at the title thus strangely bestowed on him.

"Rocky Mountains! Ridin' ag'inst Sage-Bush Sweeney! Breakin' ponies in the Panhandle! What a lot o' rot that reporter's been gittin' off!"

Yet, he was manifestly pleased at finding himself made a hero in this remarkable way, and did not take his eyes from the account until he had read it through.

A paragraph at the bottom caused him to stare more wildly than ever:

"Gunnison George could not be found at the conclusion of his own performance, though Salsbury, Burke, and even Colonel Cody himself, sought everywhere for him. If he is still in the city, and sees these lines, he will know that Colonel Cody greatly desires to see him, and will favor that gentleman by calling at the Wild West exhibition."

"Phew!" and Billy Stubbs opened his eyes widely and whistled his surprise.

He could hardly believe the paragraph true; but, on turning to the "Personals," he found there one reading thus:

"If Gunnison George will call at the 'Wild West' he will confer on me a favor. W. F. Cody. ('Buffalo Bill.')

Fortunately for Billy Stubbs there were very few passengers on the train at that

early hour, else his excited antics must have been noticed.

When he left the train and started out to distribute his papers, his mind was not at all on his task. Indeed, he was so exceedingly absent-minded, that more than once he passed a customer, who was forced to call sharply after him to get the morning news.

The boy was in a quandary.

He was extremely desirous of seeing the great scout, of whom he had heard so much, but he feared to make the venture. There was a grand mistake or deception somewhere. He knew that he was the rough rider referred to in the laudatory newspaper account. But he was equally sure he was not Gunnison George of the Rocky Mountains. Whether or not there was any such famous horseman as Gunnison George he had no means of knowing.

When he had sold his papers—he had retained in his pocket the one he had read—he sought a quiet corner and read over again and again that marvelous bit of reporting.

It almost drove his mind from all thoughts of the hours he had spent in the cannon, and of Jack Rackstraw.

"If I could only find Chicago Charlie!" he mused. "He could tell me what to do. Hanged if I can tell myself. Seems as if I ain't got head enough on me this morning to know who I am. Gunnison George! Sage-Bush Sweeney!"

Thus muttering, he turned about and hurried across the intervening ground to the lake front. Thoughts of Chicago Charlie had put him in mind of Jack Rackstraw, and he was resolved to show the newspapers to Rackstraw and to be guided by the sailor's advice.

Rackstraw had not slept much that night—in fact had scarcely lain down. After seeking everywhere for his young chum, he had at last made his way to the Andy Johnson, and gone on board. But, he had not been able to rest, and was now one of the first of those on the vessel whom Billy saw, as the latter came hurrying down the wharf.

"You owdacious young rascal!" were the words that greeted the newsboy; and though they were roughly couched, words had never sounded sweeter, for the kindness of the tones belied the severity of the form of expression.

"Playin' larks on yer old chum, eh? Is that what you've been doin'? I've a notion to take a boat-hook to ye!"

The Andy Johnson was lying against the wharf, and Rackstraw sprung over the rail at a bound; and the next moment was wringing Billy's hand with as much cordiality and energy as if the boy were some long-lost brother.

"Tell me where you went las' night! Out wi' it, or I'll chuck you into the lake. Here I've been a-turnin' gray thinkin' you was dead, or something!"

Billy drew him away from the vessel's side, and showed him the paper.

Rackstraw, when he saw the staring headlines, and read enough to comprehend what was there printed, was dumfounded.

"Some of them reporters hain't got good sense, Billy Stubbs! But, hang me! you did stick onto that critter like mud! What else does it say?"

"Buffalo Bill wants to see me!"

Billy pointed a forefinger at the personal.

Rackstraw roared like a steam whistle, so great was his mirth.

"Gunnison George! Hip—hip!"

He seemed about to break forth in a series of cheers.

"But what do you think of it?"

Rackstraw cooled down and rubbed his eyes.

"What do I think of it? Why, I do—I mean, I'd go an' see him!"

"Buffalo Bill?"

"Why not?" said Rackstraw. "He's advertised fer ye. 'Lost, strayed or stolen! A boy rider, as is supposed to be Gunnison George of the Rocky Mountains. A reward of five dollars fer returnin' of him to the Wild West show!'"

"Them ain't the words, but that's about what they means, ain't it? Of course you'll go; an' I'll go along of you! Had any breakfast?"

"Not a bit. Haven't had time!"

"Come aboard, then. We'll talk it over—"

while we're takin' ballast! Where'd you go las' night?"

Billy Stubbs was hungry enough to do justice to the food Rackstraw placed before him; and between bites he placed his friend in possession of the incidents of the night.

They were sufficiently astonishing to make the honest sailor stare.

Rackstraw kept up a running fire of comment, that was sometimes humorous and sometimes serious; and when Billy had stowed away the last mouthful, the sailor announced his readiness to go straight to the grounds of the Wild West.

CHAPTER XXIII

OUT OF THE SNARE.

PURSUING the adventures of Billy Stubbs has led us too far from Chicago Charlie and the dire peril in which he was placed.

But for his forethought in communicating with the inspector, he would have plunged to death, when he fell blindly through the gloom into the basement of the old house.

The crash of his fall had not ceased to be heard, when there came a shrill whistle. It was from the boy who had lured him to the door, and who was now stationed without to act as a sentinel.

The plans against Chicago Charlie had been most complete, and the thoughts and aims of the planners had been most murderous in their character. They had emanated from desperate men:—men who shrunk from nothing that looked to securing their safety.

Two of them were advancing out of the gloom toward the senseless detective, when that shrill and warning whistle reached them. They stopped instantly:

"Cops!"

This expressive exclamation was followed by a muttered curse.

Then, abandoning their intentions concerning the Columbian Detective, their dreaded foe, they sprang away through the darkness and hurried to the floor above, where a window permitted them to look out on the street.

What they saw told them that their worst suspicions were correct.

Two or three men in citizens' clothing were on the street just below the building, and others, similarly dressed, had advanced into the small yard. Still another was to be seen at the foot of the rotten stairway.

"They've got the house surrounded!" one of the men fearfully whispered, drawing back in much alarm. "I reckon we're in for it, Swipesey!"

His companion, who was none other than the fierce-eyed villain of the Lakeside League, in low-toned maledictions, cursed the Columbian Detective.

They saw they were in a trap, from which it would be difficult to escape, and in consequence were much exercised.

"If we'd only done him up," growled the amiable Swipesey, shaking his fist in the direction of the basement. "He's the cause of this!"

"That feller's comin' up the stairs!" announced the other, who had again placed his face to the window. "We've got the slidel!"

They did not take the trouble to discover the fate of the boy, but, plunging again below stairs, they made their way to a coal-hole opening on an alley.

The alley was guarded, but it offered the only way of retreat.

"Two more cops out there!" Swipesey whispered back, drawing in his head like a tortoise. "We've got to make a break for it, or s'render!"

"Not 'slong's I've got good legs under me, an' no bullets in my back!" his companion growled.

Each of them was "wanted" for a dozen crimes, and the knowledge of what capture meant for them made them desperate.

Swipesey, who was in the lead and who had peered out of the coal-hole, took a bulldog revolver from his pocket and nervously fingered it, as he again advanced to the opening.

At that moment they were made aware that the officers had gained entrance to the house. They could hear footsteps lightly pacing the floor above them.

"If I go down, there'll be some one go

down with me!" Swipesey threateningly snarled, uneasily shifting the revolver.

"Hyer I goes. I'm goin' to dive for the alley that's jist back."

The other was crowding close at his heels. The next moment a revolver cracked at the street entrance.

Swipesey and his "pard" had made a bold rush; and, being detected in the act, had been fired on by the officer stationed there.

Swipesey swung around, recklessly returned the shot, and then sped on.

Other revolvers opened, ominously breaking the quiet of the night. But the shots did no execution; and these daring members of the Lakeside League, having gained the other alley, sped away unharmed.

The prompt intervention of the police had saved the life of Chicago Charlie, but the police had not been able to hold in their net his would-be murderers.

The boy who had given the alarm, had mysteriously disappeared, and, though he was probably in hiding somewhere in the house, the officers were unable to find him.

Those who had descended into the basement—for the broken floor had shown where the detective was to be found—discovered Clingstone, doubled in a heap among some rubbish and broken boards, and still in an unconscious condition.

But no bones had been broken, and his injuries were not severe. They amounted only to some contusions.

"Sound as a dollar, yet!" one of the policemen averred, pressing a brandy flask to the detective's lips. "Send for an ambulance!"

The liquor had a reviving effect; and long before the ambulance arrived Chicago Charlie was able to sit up, and announce his ability to stand, and even to walk.

"Thanks, boys! You don't know how grateful I am for all you've done for me, and desire to do; but I don't care to be carried to a hospital in a wagon. I'm all right, or will be in a few minutes!"

As a proof of it he got on his legs, which, though they upheld him, were a little unsteady.

However, the feeling of faintness and weakness soon passed away, and, supported by his brother officers, he walked into the street.

There they took a cab for the office of the inspector, where they made their report.

"I was a fool for walking into that trap," Charlie confessed. "Perhaps, though, it will teach me a lesson."

Whether or not it did, will be seen later.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SCENT OF A ROSE.

CHARLIE CLINGSTONE was much worried over this singular attack.

Of course, he had no idea who the men were that had made this attempt on his life, but the fact that such an attempt had been made seemed to prove that his latest disguise had been penetrated; and he returned to his room that night, much depressed.

The strain of the last few days was telling on him sorely. Not a trace had he been able to find of Daisy Malcomb.

"No news, no news!" he groaned, sinking his face in his hands.

The hope that she might be found in that old house and be rescued by him had been so rudely removed that it was even yet a shock.

"Where can she be? Where can she have gone?" he repeated over and over, looking at the unanswering walls.

It was scarcely a relief to turn from thoughts of Daisy to thoughts of John Malcomb. The mysterious shape dimly seen that night in the corridor continued to haunt him like a depressing nightmare.

So far, he had not only failed to discover John Malcomb's murderer, but new mysteries, which were insolvable, thickened about him.

There were only three facts to which he could cling:

John Malcomb had been murdered! Could he doubt that?

Carefully he went over the facts known to him: He had seen Malcomb lying with rigid

face in a pool of blood, which had oozed from a wound in his back. He had seen the bloody attempt at writing on the wall. He had handled the stained knife—which was even now in his possession. He had seen Malcomb buried!

Yes, John Malcomb was dead. There could not be the shadow of a doubt of it.

What, then, had he seen that night in the Malcomb house?

That was the second mystery!

Had he seen anything?

Groaningly he pressed his hands against his aching head, for the fear smote him that he was losing his mind.

The third mystery was the disappearance of Daisy. And that letter! That letter!

He took it out and read it over again; as he had done so many, many times before.

"My God, why did she do that? Why did she leave in that way? Why did she not give me her reasons?"

The letters swam before his eyes.

"I'm done up!" he at length declared, rising. "I must go to bed and get some rest, or the result will be that I'll be as dead as those rascals want me to be."

Though he went to bed, he slept little, tossing and moaning restlessly throughout the remainder of the night.

He was hardly in condition for the work that might be expected of him that morning; but he went, nevertheless, to Youngblood's office in the Malcomb house, endeavoring to hide his depression under a light and airy demeanor.

He had taken much pains to remove all evidences of the dreadful fall he had received, and had succeeded remarkably well. But there was a heaviness about his eyes that could not fail to attract the attention of a close observer.

It did not fail to attract the attention of Solon Youngblood, who, when he came in, glanced keenly at his secretary.

"Out too late last night, I'm afraid, Dennison! Late hours generally play the devil with a young fellow. I didn't know you were given to such dissipation?"

Dennison was the name which Charlie had given as his own.

He averred that he had not been dissipating, but felt a little under the weather. Then the work of the day was gone through with, in the usual manner.

So far, the Columbian Detective's efforts to secure proof against Solon Youngblood by means of the letters and papers in the office had amounted to nothing. There were letters and papers in abundance, but none of them contained what he sought.

Youngblood seemed to be doing a brokerage business, for his correspondence usually concerned the purchase and sale of various kinds of stocks and securities.

It was in all respects an uneventful day. Youngblood was kind and courteous, the clerk painstaking and quiet; and when the office hours came to a close, Youngblood crowned the kindness of the day by inviting the detective to spend the evening with him at the house.

"I think it will do you good," was the assertion. "You're brooding over something, and I know it. Mrs. Youngblood will be delighted to see you, and we'll try to make it as pleasant as we can. May we look for you?"

Ordinarily this would have been a most pleasing invitation. Just then, however, Chicago Charlie felt in no mood for the frivolities of light and fashionable small-talk.

He hesitated a moment before replying.

Then, feeling that no harm would come from it, and that something of importance might be developed, he replied, accepting the invitation.

There never was a more gracious and charming woman than Mrs. Solon Youngblood, when she took the trouble to make herself so. She was an intelligent woman, and she was handsome and brilliant—possessing an indescribable chic and fund of vivacity. And on this evening she strove to make herself most agreeable.

There were cards, and afterward a light luncheon, with excellent coffee, served in fragile, egg-shell cups.

At any other time, or under other circumstances, Chicago Charlie might have enjoyed the evening. But he felt ill at ease. Nor could the sparkling talk of the beauti-

ful woman who called herself Mrs. Solon Youngblood win him away from morbid thoughts. Besides, he felt that these people were not friends;—felt, somehow, deep down in his heart, that they knew that they were not his friends, but were making this effort for a purpose.

He recalled the experience of the night before. But for that he might not have harbored a suspicious thought. But that told him his disguise had been penetrated by enemies;—and the chief of his enemies, he was quite sure, was this smiling man who sat beside him:—Solon Youngblood.

Nevertheless, in spite of his depressing reflections and conjectures, he strove to appear at ease; and that he did not fully succeed was in nowise his fault. Many another man would have failed even more entirely.

At last, when he felt that it was almost time for him to go, he found himself alone with Mrs. Youngblood. The discovery did not disturb him at once, for he expected Youngblood to return to the apartment at any moment.

But when Solon did not come, he began to fidget, his uneasiness slowly growing.

Mrs. Youngblood's keen eyes were on him.

"I weary you with my prattle," she confessed.

Then she got up quickly; and, placing two small glasses on the table, poured wine into each.

He shook his head.

"Hasn't your husband told you of my temperance proclivities?" he questioned, mildly looking at her. "But for that, I should be glad to join with you!"

She pushed the glass away.

Only a minute before he had refused to taste the bit of apple she had laughingly offered.

He was becoming intensely suspicious and alert, and Mrs. Solon Youngblood could hardly have failed to notice it.

Looking at her, as she stood there, smiling and handsome, he could not but think of the Borgias. Was Lucretia ever so charming, so winning—so dangerous?

"You will at least take this as a souvenir of your call?" and she carefully took from her bosom the large rose which he had more than once admired that evening. "I hope you have had a most pleasant time; and am I presumptuous in wishing that we may be able to see you here again, some evening, in the not distant future?"

She extended the rose, which he could scarcely refuse to accept. His distrust of this woman seemed preposterously silly. He was a man and armed. How could she harm him, if he remained on guard against poison? If they had meant poisoning they would have attempted it earlier in the evening.

He took the rose, which was a large and handsome one, and pressed it against his nostrils, clasping it rather tightly with his fingers.

Instantly from the heart of the rose came a blinding explosion. An impalpable, peppery powder filled his eyes and overpowering odors suffocated him and rendered him half-unconscious.

He heard Mrs. Youngblood give a little tittering laugh, and knew that she had advanced close to his chair.

It was a large arm-chair, in which he had remained seated most of the evening.

He crouched in it now, blinded and helpless, and hardly knowing what he was doing.

Then he felt himself clasped by strong arms.

The beautiful fiend who had given him the explosive rose, had touched a spring beneath the chair; and iron hooks, which had seemed part of the chair's framework, had clasped him in a steely embrace!

CHAPTER XXV.

A BEAUTIFUL FIEND.

THE grasp of those steely arms brought him back to a full sense of his peril. The peppery powder still partially blinded him, and his eyes felt on fire. Nevertheless, he strove to rise from the chair.

The laugh of Mrs. Solon Youngblood sounded cruelly in his ears.

"Quite a little surprise, is it not?" came the mocking question. "I have another rose here. Do you think you would care for it?"

Through his blurred vision he saw her pluck at her corsage.

But no other indignity immediately followed.

"You were in too great haste to leave me," she sneered. "Do you think I care only for the company of Mr. Youngblood? It is not often I have the pleasure of speech with so gallant a young gentleman as yourself."

There was a bitterness in the words that showed she was not pleased that her efforts to amuse and hold him at her side had seemed so impotent. If there was one thing more than another on which Mrs. Solon Youngblood flattered herself, it was her ability in that line.

"My God, woman! What do you mean to do with me?" the Columbian Detective managed to ejaculate. "What is the meaning of this outrage?"

"You are a very shrewd man and a very capable man, Mr. Dennison, but you're not always as wide-awake as you might be. I do not think the police will appear to-night to release you! You forgot to warn them, did you not?"

Then Chicago Charlie understood the full strength of the plot.

Having failed in their attempt of the night previous, a resort had been had to an even bolder game by those who had then sought his life.

He now knew that, whoever had been the parties luring him to the old house, Solon Youngblood was their leader and directing spirit.

"You're a very smart man, Chicago Charlie! But the smartest men sometimes make mistakes. You will not have the opportunity to make many more."

Any one not understanding the meaning of the words might have thought that this handsome creature was addressing the man before her in the most cordial way, for the sting hidden in their depth was so subtle as to be almost indistinguishable.

Yet Chicago Charlie caught it, and writhed in impotent rage and pain.

She passed a handkerchief delicately across his face, removing much of the substance that had so blinded him.

Then she stood before him, flashing on him a most defiant look. A look, too, that was full of hate and scorn.

"You think we haven't known you," she asserted. "But you were never more mistaken. We have known you from the first day—from the first hour!"

The fierceness of a tigress was now in her tones.

Chicago Charlie groaned and struggled anew. He might as well have saved his strength. The steel arms that had clasped him were tenacious in their grip, and he could do absolutely nothing to release himself. He could only look at the fair fiend who was thus exasperatingly tormenting him.

"Why don't you kill me, and be done with it, if that is your intention?" he questioned, rendered desperate.

But for the thought that he had been so duped, Chicago Charlie would as soon have died there, as anywhere. The despondency of despair was seizing him and life seemed scarcely worth the purchase.

It will be remembered that he had suffered much during the week past; that his fondest hopes had been dashed to the ground, that failure had followed every effort. More than once had he felt that he did not care for life.

Yet he did not wish to die like a rat in a trap.

"Do your worst, woman!" he imperiously commanded. "A man can only die once; and I don't know that it matters much when that one time comes. It's a question whether a long life is better than a short one."

She laughed him in the face.

"You hope to induce me to kill you there, and so end the play. I am not ready, for I'm afraid it might please you, and I do not care to please the kind of man you are known to be!"

She took up from the table another rose, whose perfume—so sweet and fragrant—Charlie had more than once noticed.

Then she took from a pocket a small bottle, and sprinkled its contents lavishly on the petals.

"Another flower!" she whispered, balefully advancing.

He drew back, with almost a cry of terror. The bottle had held chloroform.

"My poor, dear boy! Don't you like the smell of a rose?"

That mocking smile had come back to her lips.

The detective, clutched by those steely arms, could not lift a hand to push her from him.

"There is no trick about this!" she smilingly urged. "It is only a plain every-day rose, with a little perfume sprinkled over it."

She had knelt at his side; and now, laying a hand caressingly on his shoulder, she lifted the flower to his nostrils.

He fought and almost screamed; but he could do nothing, except shake his head, to repel this novel attack.

"Smell it!" she crooningly urged. "You are excited. You are feverish! It will soothe you. It will make you sleep. Sleep is what you want, my poor fellow. Sound, never-ending sleep!"

At every sentence, she crowded the rose against his face, holding it there in spite of his exertions to escape from it.

Notwithstanding his determination to withstand the effects of the chloroform, an indescribable feeling of drowsiness began to take possession of him.

More than once, he roused himself, when he heard the crooning voice of this female wretch taking on a distant and suggestive sound.

Then he would rage again; only to drop back into half-somnolence, under the effects of the Lethean drug.

"Sleep is what you want, my poor fellow! Sound, never-ending sleep!"

These words came to him like the tinkle of a bell, or the lulling voice of falling water.

Once more, he threw off the strange spell, and shook from himself the dragging weight that sat on his shoulders.

"I will not yield to that infernal stuff!" he screamed. "Take it away! Take it away!"

"It is what you need!" came the crooning tones again. "What you need. What you need!"

It seemed to him that those words, "what you need!" were being repeated over and over, until they ran into a lulling song.

His head drooped.

Lower and lower it sunk on his breast. His breathing became labored.

Still Mrs. Solon Youngblood pressed that deadly rose against his mouth.

Lower and lower sunk the head.

Then the muscles of the helpless man wholly relaxed, and he lay as limp as if dead.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN PERIL DIRE.

CHICAGO CHARLIE was aroused by a dash of water. A breaking "whitecap," hurling its spray, touching him, and its coolness brought a gasp of returning sensibility. He opened his eyes slowly and strove to rise.

But he sunk back, through sheer weakness, and because of the terror inspired by his discovery.

He was in an open boat, in the midst of a stormy sea, on a starless night! A flash of lightning revealed this; and the roll of the thunder's reverberation drowned the cry that rose to his lips.

Again he strove to lift himself. A sense of peril made alert his mental faculties, but the lethargic influences of the drug still held his muscles in a powerful grasp.

When the Columbian Detective had succumbed to the influence of the chloroform, and Mrs. Solon Youngblood saw that he had become unconscious, she gave him a keen glance, and then moved softly away.

She was back in a very few moments, and at her heels tip-toed two men. Both were masked and armed; though any one with suspicions quickened could have seen that the taller of the two was Solon Youngblood.

"He knows no more than a stone," she whispered, indicating the chair where lay the helpless detective.

She had turned the light low, and only a subdued gloom reigned in the apartment.

Solon Youngblood and his companion advanced as if they feared the victim of her wiles might awaken.

The knowledge of the cruel thing they meant to do, oppressed them with its terror. Besides, they had so frequently been balked in their schemas against the life of the Columbian Detective that they were not certain even yet that their prey would not slip through their fingers.

Solon Youngblood was physically a powerful man, and it was seemingly no difficult thing for him to lift the body of Chicago Charlie, unaided even by the man who had come to assist him.

He drew the limp form erect, while Mrs. Youngblood shot back the steel arms of the chair; and both smiled, when they saw what a harmless-looking chair it became when those hidden claws were once more out of sight.

The two men then bore the detective from the room, descending quietly with him to the street.

A cab was there in waiting, in which their burden was placed; they climbing in after it.

Then the whip was laid on the horse and the cab rolled away toward the northern part of the city, its ultimate destination being the lake front.

For a long time the quick gait was continued.

There were very few people on the streets; for, in addition to the lateness of the hour, the wind was hysterically screaming, and heavy masses of black clouds portended a storm. Occasionally a crooked tongue of flame lighted the sky, which was followed by a peal that caused the houses to shake.

Unmindful of these disagreeable circumstances—being in fact rather gratified by them—the driver of the cab held quietly and serenely on his way. He had no desire to attract attention.

The stacks of tall buildings marking the business portions of the city had been long passed, and they were now nearing the suburbs. The cottages seemed interminable, stretching on mile after mile. It was most exasperating to the two villains in the cab, who were so desirous that the work upon which they had entered should be brought to a speedy end.

Then the cottages began to disappear, clumps of trees became more numerous, and larger plots of ground grew common.

But even yet the driver did not draw rein; nor did he stop until the last house had been left far behind and the sound of waves told him that the lake was near.

When a flash of lightning showed him the tumbling waters just in front, he brought the cab to a halt; and, climbing down, swung open one of the doors.

"A cursed long time you were getting here!" Youngblood growled, scrambling down and stretching his cramped limbs. "Seems to me you have driven far enough to have reached the State line. How many miles are we out, anyhow?"

The fellow was not pleased at the tone and his reply was little more than a surly growl.

Youngblood laughed, bitterly.

"Well, we'll not quarrel. Neither of us can afford to. But I thought we'd never have done with it. My back's broke with stooping over that fellow, applying that chloroform to his nose. I thought the fumes of the stuff would do me up. 'Twould have been a go, if you'd found all three of us lying in there asleep!"

He laughed again, showing a desire to mollify the surly driver.

"Are you ready to take him out?" came the voice of the third member of the party, who was still in the cab.

At this Youngblood and the driver turned to the door; and the limp form of the detective being pushed into view, they seized it, drew it out, and bore it down to the sands of the lake shore.

Then the driver went back to tie the horse and to scout around a bit to make sure they had not been observed.

When he returned, Solon's assistant had produced two boats from some point in the darkness; and he was now standing by these, having drawn them up on the sandy point.

Youngblood was kneeling at Chicago Charlie's side, again applying an odorous handkerchief.

"Curse the fellow, he's got a head like iron! Bear a hand here, and we'll have done with it. I don't like the looks of the lake, but it's all the better for our little scheme."

The threatenings of the storm were increasing. There had been several dashes of rain; and, as he spoke, there came another. The sand, caught up by the stiff breeze, flew in a shower.

"If we don't hurry we'll not be able to get out on the lake at all."

He had caught the detective by the shoulders and, his companions coming to his aid, Chicago Charlie was lifted into the smaller of the two boats. Both were then pushed into the water.

Seated in the first, or larger, to which the second was attached by a rope, the three men began to strain and tug at their oars, moving by almost imperceptible degrees out into the waste of stormy waters.

For a time they made very little progress, it being about all they could do to keep the head of the boat pointed in the right direction.

Chicago Charlie had not been bound before being placed in the boat; it being the intention of his enemies to cast the boat adrift, when they had made a good offing. It seemed pretty certain that the waves would ultimately engulf it, and this was the more assured by the gathering strength of the storm. Even should he return to consciousness, a thing they did not deem likely, he would be utterly helpless in that small boat, without oars and uncertain of his position.

They believed that he would be drowned; and that his body and the submerged or overturned boat being found the next day, there would arise a very natural supposition that he had ventured out alone, and been thus lost.

Solon Youngblood was one of the craftiest of his ilk, and never took chances when he could avoid it.

When they had succeeded in placing a considerable distance between themselves and the land, they found the work of rowing much easier. The waves did not run as high as nearer in, and the "white caps" did not break so furiously.

Nevertheless, they were drenched with spray, and but for their exertions would have been chilled and very uncomfortable.

But they did not cease their rowing until as much as a mile yawned between the boats and the shore. Then Youngblood, crouching in the stern of the boat, took hold of the rope and drew the other boat alongside.

Climbing in it, he again applied to the nostrils of the insensible man a handkerchief steeped in chloroform, of which he appeared to have plentiful supply. Then he cast the handkerchief from him, climbed back into the first boat, and removed the rope from the boat in which lay the detective.

He was very careful in all he did, that nothing should be left to indicate the real manner of Chicago Charlie's death.

The wind which was from the north, caught the boat of the helpless detective and soon bore it from sight. But for the frequent play of the lightning it could not have been seen ten feet away.

Something like a malediction arose to the lips of Youngblood, as he saw the little craft float out of sight, and a sigh of relief fell from his lips. They were pallid lips, with almost the hue of death on them; for, in spite of his iron nerve and hardened nature, the deed of this night sat heavy on his conscience.

But he had been so hounded and harassed by the Columbian Detective that he had felt called to resort to extremes; and there was no doubt he would have repeated the act had it been necessary.

The waves rose higher and higher, lashing the breast of the lake with their spray, and the uncertain rain fell in drenching showers, at frequent intervals. It was truly a wild

night, and growing wilder. But not yet had the storm broken in full force.

The little boat containing the detective already held a great deal of water; and when Chicago Charlie was aroused by that flit of the waves, and looked so startledly about him, he was made aware of the fact that he was lying in a pool of water that had soaked his clothing through and through.

His mind acted quickly, and it took him but a moment to comprehend to the full his terrible situation. The incidents of the night returned in quick succession. The last he could recall was that scene in the room of the Malcomb house, with Mrs. Solon Youngblood kneeling at his side, pressing the rose to his lips, and whispering those lulling, slumberous words.

All that followed was a blank; yet he knew where he was. Not the exact position of the boat, nor how far from land; but he knew that he was out on the lake, and in peril most dire.

Again he tried to lift himself; and finally succeeded so well that he could sit half erect with head resting against the boat's side.

He waited impatiently for a friendly lightning-flash.

It came, showing him his utter helplessness.

The boat was oarless and tossing at the mercy of the waves. The lightning-flash revealed something else. A towering billow that threatened to engulf him.

He closed his eyes, uttered a prayer, expecting to find himself the next instant struggling in the water. But a yeasty line appeared at the apex of the green roller, which thus broke harmlessly, and the boat rode safely in the milky sea.

But a second lightning-flash revealed another billow, towering still higher, and the detective closed his eyes in terror, feeling that he was indeed lost.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TRACKING ZEL MAGRUDER.

BILLY STUBBS was in high glee. No interview he had ever had, had resulted more satisfactorily than the one just held with Buffalo Bill. Not only had the great scout been kind and courteous; but, seeing in the boy evidences of talent in the horseback line, he had offered to give him a position, and train him for the work of a rough rider.

Billy had felt forced to decline this most generous offer. Just now he owed allegiance to Chicago Charlie, and the work Chicago Charlie had given him remained unperformed.

"Well, think over it! There are plenty of riders to be had, but I believe you might make your mark in that line. You have the native ability."

Billy was not so sure of this, remembering the terror inspired by the broncho; but he did not refuse the season pass to the Wild West exhibition, which the famous scout placed in his hand.

Rackstraw was equally favored, and the two went away smiling and happy. Luck had surely been with them.

"I'll be expectin' to kick up gold dollars from the sidewalk, next," Rackstraw averred, his mouth distended in a grin. "I say, now, Billy Stubbs, that was the handsome thing! Buffalo Bill, forever! 'Rah, 'rah! Hip, hip!"

He swung his cap, and, but for the time and place, would have given vent to his exuberance in a series of roaring cheers.

Two nights later Billy Stubbs was again on the trail of Zel Magruder; and the trail led him, as before, into the camp of the Gypsies.

He crouched for a time in the shadow of the tent usually occupied by Gypsy Nell; and then, finding a favorable opportunity, when Zel and the crone were both talking outside, he crept into the tent himself and sought concealment beneath a pile of straw.

The straw was hardly in place over him when the two came back, continuing the conversation.

The words were of a startling character.

"I don't think you ought to had anything to do with that girl, Zel!" the crone was protesting. "You'll go and git yourself into the worst snarl that ever was. Mind what I tell you!"

"You're always growlin'!" Magruder made

answer. "Nothin' I can do any more pleases you. It's Zel don't do this, an' Zel don't do that, tell you run me wild. What in the dickens would you have me do, anyhow?"

"I wouldn't have you lay a finger on Daisy Malcomb—that's what!"

"I hain't laid no finger on her. I hain't teched her. I dunno as I've spoke to her."

"See, then, that you don't!"

"Anything else, old growler?" and Zel threw himself into a rickety chair and squinted up at the crone.

"Where've ye got her?"

He winked and laid a finger against the side of his nose.

"Guess, Nell! You're a fortune-teller an' ought to be good at guessin'. If ye can't, I won't tell ye. It's one of the rules I don't dare to break!"

Billy Stubbs was wild with excitement, and so quick and hard did his breathing become that more than once he was on the verge of self-betrayal.

He could not see their actions; but, when the crone's words again reached him, they showed that she had turned away and was in another part of the tent. But they were as crabbed as before.

"You break them rules ever' five minutes, an' yet you're always talkin' about keepin' them. You'll hang yerself yit, Zel Magruder! Mark my words!"

"Then I won't git drowned, er chopped up in a railroad accident!"

Zel plucked a straw from Billy's hiding-place, and thoughtfully chewed it, as he nursed his chin.

"Say, what makes ye so blamed int'rested in that girl?"

"None o' your business!" grunted the old woman. "You won't tell me nothin', an' oughtn't expect anything better in return."

Zel subsided, but still chewed at the straw.

Billy's suspense was great. Was he to learn anything of importance?

Had he not already done that? He knew that Chicago Charlie would hail with delight any news assuring him that Daisy Malcomb was alive.

There could be no doubt, he thought, that Daisy was alive, and held somewhere by the Lakeside Leaguers. Oh! if Magruder had only told *where*!

But Magruder grew silent and obstinate, after that repulse by the old woman; and, finally spitting away the straw, he got up and sullenly left the tent.

"He'll be hung, yit!" Billy heard the crone mutter. "I do no', though, as I'll care. He ain't no good. No; he's bad from top to toe; an' he'll bring ruin on all o' us, sooner er later!"

Billy was in a quandary. He intensely desired to follow Zel, and there was no way of getting out of the tent.

The crone showed no intention of immediately leaving it, but moved about, engaged in some occupation, all unmindful of the spy, who lay crouching almost at her feet.

Suddenly Gypsy Nell was startled by a sneeze. It was a sneeze, too, of mammoth proportions, and came apparently from the ground just in front of her.

One of the straws had got into Billy's nose, and brought forth that prodigious sound.

In spite of her years, the crone was keen-eyed and shrewd. She knew her senses had not deceived her, and she was equally sure that the sound had not issued from the earth.

Rightly divining that the straw must hold some one concealed, she stepped toward it, and with a stick carefully raked it away, standing back as if she expected a rat to scud out.

She gave a little scream of fright, when her eyes fell on Billy.

The newsboy leaped up, hoping to make his escape.

But the Gypsy woman caught him by the collar of his coat and held him with a grasp that was remarkably firm and strong. In vain did Billy squirm and twist. He could not wrench himself loose.

"No yer don't, you young rascal! Not till you tell me what you mean by this! What you doir' under that straw, in my house?"

Billy saw that he must assume a bold front.

"Call this a house?" he said, facing her

bravely. "Thought this hyer was a Gypsy tent. Come in hyer awhile ago, I did, to git me fortune told, and dropped down there an' went to sleep. Wasn't nobody hyer to wait on me."

Nell knew he was lying.

She flung him into a chair, and took a seat where she could prevent his escape.

Something in the boy's face attracted her, and she looked at him keenly and closely, bending forward in her inspection.

Billy stared in surprise.

"Think mebbe I'm Charlie Ross, hay? Well, I hain't, then? If you're a fortune-teller you ort to know who I am."

"I do!" she averred. "I know a good deal more about you than you do yourself. Zel Magruder's lookin' for you!"

Billy half arose in fright.

"Set down there! He's not comin' back right away. Now, what's your name?"

"Lost it awhile ago!" Billy declared.

"What's your name?" she impatiently demanded, tapping the ground with the stick, which she still held.

"Gunnison George, o' the Rocky Mountains!" said Billy.

"Who calls you that?"

"The newspapers! Didn't ye see 'em to-day? Gunnison George, what beat Sagebrush Sweeney in that big trick race last year!"

"That isn't your name!" shaking her head in a manner to show she was not pleased. "You call yourself Billy Stubbs. That isn't your name, either!"

Billy was quite shaken out of the snarl of falsehoods he was weaving, by this unexpected declaration.

"What is it, then?" he asked, his face showing his sudden interest.

She laughed.

"I thought I'd catch you!"

"Then you don't know what my name is? What made ye say that, I'd like to know?"

"Oh, I don't know! Perhaps it's because I believe you're a Gypsy!"

Billy's mouth flew open.

"A Gypsy?"

"That's what I said. A Gypsy! You wouldn't like to join our band, now, would you? I'm sure you're a Gypsy!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

QUEER TALK OF THE GYPSY CRONE.

BILLY, who had been much frightened at first, had completely lost this fear, and was now intensely interested. Therefore, when the crone imperiously took his hand, he did not offer to withdraw it.

"You said awhile ago you came here to git yer fortune told! You didn't; but I'll tell it for ye, anyway. It must be an interestin' fortune, by the look of yer face. Want to hear it?"

Billy thought of Zel Magruder.

She interpreted his glance, for he had turned in a frightened way toward the door of the tent.

"That rascal ain't comin' back fer a good while. I think he's goin' out on the lake. If he don't, he's got a sweetheart that'll keep him, so you needn't be afraid o' Zel."

Billy wondered why she spoke to him in that manner. Why was she so friendly? Did she entertain evil designs against him?

The questions were unanswerable, and he thought it unwise to put them into words; but they made him uneasy.

The crone was closely examining the palm of his hand.

"It's an interestin' fortune, anyway," she exclaimed. "You've had experience enough to make a book."

Billy became possessed of mingled feelings of fear and awe.

"Sho! You don't see anything *there*!"

"I see the lake. I see a boy struggling in the water. Is the boy Billy Stubbs? Yes, it is Billy Stubbs!"

"Sounds like a lesson out of the second reader," thought Billy.

Nevertheless, he wondered much at what he heard.

"He has been knocked into the lake; but he does not drown! He swims ashore!"

"You're off, there," Billy mentally commented; but still he held his peace.

"Now he is tracking a man. It is a little man."

"Of course she knows about me follerin' Zel Magruder!" was Billy's scornful thought. "Who couldn't tell them kind o' fortunes?"

"This little man has a sweetheart, who is also a Gypsy—an Egyptian Gypsy!"

This was so manifestly a reference to the dancing girl that Billy's interest quickened.

"She is blood of the Gypsy blood, though she sometimes claims not too be; an' she an' the little man are gitting too thick to thrive."

"Ah! the boy is a Gypsy, too. Three Gypsies!—like the three little Indians all in a row. Blood of one blood; and blood is—*is* it thicker than water? That's what the Gypsies say!"

"It's redder sometimes! and there's a stain of it on the hands of the little man. He has tried to wash it off, but can't. It is the red, red stain of murder."

Billy Stubbs's eyes had taken on a staring look, and his lips were parted.

Then the old woman, pretending thus to tell his fortune, recounted the incidents of the murder of John Malcomb; very much as she had recounted them to Daisy Malcomb; only that, in this instance, the murder was manifestly attributed to Zel Magruder instead of the Englishman, Selwyn Fisher.

Billy Stubbs would have been more puzzled than ever if he had known of that other "fortune," told several days before.

He was puzzled enough as it was; though he was keen enough to know what she was striking at Magruder.

What most mystified him was that she should thus seek to cast suspicion on Magruder. She must indeed have hated the little Gypsy intensely!

She was through at last; and Billy Stubbs realized that of himself she had really told nothing—save that he was a Gypsy—blood of the Gypsy blood.

He did not believe this. Was sure it could not be true.

She cast away the hand, showing that she had finished.

"Is that all?" Billy questioned.

"Would you want more?"

Billy looked at her keenly; and would have given much to know what was passing in her mind.

"Why did Zel Magruder go out on the lake to-night?"

It was a bold venture; but the very boldness of the question seemed to please the woman.

"You're a Gypsy!" she declared. "Blood of the Gypsy blood! Otherwise I would not speak to you this way. But Zel Magruder is a bad man. He will be hung. He will ruin us all. If it wasn't for that, I do no' as I'd care how soon the rope was put around his neck."

"Why did he go out on the lake? There's a cargo comin' in! There's always cargoes comin' in! 'Stuff,' he calls 'em!'"

She bent her head still nearer, seeming to fear her words might be heard.

"Do you know what that 'stuff' is, Billy Stubbs? It's rich goods, smuggled in from Canada; that's what it is. Oh, they're a bad lot, them smugglers; and Zel is about the worst among 'em. As I said, he's bound to be hung!"

"He lays around hyer, watches the police an' the officers, an' then slips out in a boat to a certain place, an' tells the smugglers all he can learn."

Her eyes were blazing, her skinny hands worked convulsively, and her voice shook.

Billy would have been as senseless as a block if he had not seen what she intended: She knew he was a spy of the police; and she hoped what she thus communicated would be borne to the authorities.

She sunk her voice still lower, until it was only a shrill whisper.

"They've got a den somewhere on the Michigan shore; I dunno jist where. But it's on the Michigan shore! On the Michigan shore! Zel told me so one night!"

"An' Zel is a-goin' out on the lake to-night?"

She nodded:

"He's already gone!"

"Does he go out every night?" Billy asked.

"Not every night. Generally not more than once a week. But he goes out again to-morrow night. It's but a small cargo to-night. To-morrow night the big cargo will

come in! To-morrow night the big cargo will come in!"

She bent swayingly forward, and rocked herself as she repeated these words:

"To-morrow night the big cargo will come in!"

Her eyes were blazing unnaturally. Her voice was husky with passion or hate. Her form shook.

Billy, drinking in her words, could but stare at her and marvel.

She checked herself by an effort and arose from her chair.

"I have been a fool!" she declared, with fierce bitterness. "I reckon old Nell is losin' her mind. You'd better go; and I don't think you'd better come back again. Zel Magruder would like to put his fingers on you!"

Her entire manner had changed. There seemed a revulsion of feeling; or perhaps she felt that she had carried her revelations too far. Zel Magruder was a member of the band, and she probably realized that as such she owed some fealty.

"You'd better go!"

The words were snarled, and Billy Stubbs saw that it was not wise to remain longer. Besides, if he hoped to do anything that night—if he hoped to thwart Magruder's plans or learn anything from them, it was high time for him to leave.

He knew not what to say as a farewell; so he said nothing; but picked up his hat from the heap of straw and hastened out into the night and away from the Gypsy encampment.

What a budget of news he would have for Chicago Charlie, to be sure! His heart glowed with the thought. Daisy Malcomb was alive, and held by the smugglers; most likely held in that den on the Michigan shore. He believed the words of the crone meant all that. That was the most important of the many things he would have to tell, though the others were of almost infinite value to his detective friend.

Should he try to follow Magruder, or should he seek Chicago Charlie?

He decided on the latter course; but, when he went in search of the Columbian Detective, the latter was not to be found in his usual haunts.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WORK OF THE LIFE CREW.

"HARK!"

Clear and sharp came the explanation; and the bow oar of the life-boat rested, poised in mid-air.

Within the boat sat a crew of hardy men, listening now with straining ears, and watching with straining eyes, as the life-boat rose on the heavy waves.

Thick gloom was about them, except when the bright lightning burned across the sky, splitting the darkness like the flaming sword of an archangel.

The lake storm was on in all its fury, and the reverberations of the thunder rolled like the tones of deep-throated cannon. The spray flew blindingly—seemingly one continuous sheet; and the rain that hissed downward to meet it seemed to cement earth and air in a wall of water.

It was truly a wild night, and the most fearless of the life crew was fully aware of his peril.

The life-boat had bravely pulled out from the lake-shore directly in front of the "White City;"—pulled out into the storm and darkness, in answer to a cry that had come ringing over the boiling waves. It had been a despairing cry;—a cry that told of a human life in deadly peril.

On the shore of the lake, and part of the Great World's Fair Exhibition, is the home of the life crew. This home, a model United States Life Savings Station, lies close to the great, brick battle-ship, Illinois; and in the waters in front of the station, the life crews were accustomed to demonstrate to curious crowds of sights-seers the methods by which lives were saved from the sea.

But they were expecting real work, now; not play.

All through the night the men at the life-station had watched the angry sky and the threatening storm; feeling that there would likely be wrecks that night, and human lives in peril.

As the lightning blazed the men of this boat crew were fully outlined as they sat anxiously in the boat, swinging high on the rollers. Their faces were stern and set. The grasp of the oars had something of nervousness in it. About each strong chest might have been seen a life-preserver.

A backward glance would have revealed, too, in that blaze of light, the towering domes of the great Exposition. It was like a palace of Aladdin, lighted by a torch down-thrust from the sky.

But they did not glance backward toward the White City," but out toward the stormy waters of the open lake.

"Hark!" came the exclamation again.

Again the cry had been heard.

This time the direction was noted; and the boat's head swinging round a point, the men bent to their oars with right good will, and the boat forged toilingly through the sea.

Those despairing cries had come from the lips of the Columbian Detective!

With stiffened limbs, and body chilled and cramped, he was clinging desperately to an overturned boat, hoping and praying that help might come to him, yet almost believing that it could not.

The north wind, breaking into a furious storm, had sent the little boat down the lake, and the tumbling waves had beaten it inch by inch shoreward; until now it rolled less than a mile away and straight out from the Exposition grounds.

A gleam of those white towers came now and then to the despairing detective, bringing a ray of hope.

More than once since the boat had overturned had he thought of abandoning it in an attempt to reach the land by swimming. Had the sea been more calm, such an attempt might have been successful. But in his weakened condition he knew he could not safely trust himself in a fight against those waves.

The fact that the boat was slowly driving toward the shore, though the advance was at times almost imperceptible, gave him renewed courage. But the storm was driving down the lake, not toward the land; and while he moved only by inches toward the longed-for shore, he moved by yards southward.

Suddenly a light burned toward him across the gloom. It was an electric search-light, shining from the bow of the life-boat. He also saw—what he had seen before—particolored rockets shooting high in the air from the life-station.

The sight of the electric search-light so cheered him that he again sent out his guiding call, and with more strength and vim than before. Hope returned, full-armed and strong. The chill seemed to leave his limbs and a warm glow gathered about his heart. There was life for him yet, he thought.

Time and again his cry rung out, directing the course of the life-boat; and he did not cease his calls until the boat was almost upon him, the glare of the search-light seeming to put out his eyes.

There was no need to call more. He and the boat to which he was clinging had been sighted by the life crew.

A moment later strong arms lifted him from the water, and these skilled men were rubbing his body and extremities, and applying reviving draughts of stimulant.

The little boat was allowed to float away, for the crew had as much as they could do to hold their own craft up against the stiff wind and tumbling seas; and with their work of reviving the half-drowned detective, they had neither time nor strength for anything else.

Almost immediately the life-boat was put about for the shore; and in a remarkably short time Chicago Charlie was in a comfortable room in the life-station; and within less than a half-hour thereafter he felt almost as well and strong as ever.

But his anxiety would not permit him to remain there throughout the remainder of the night, though he was urged and even commanded to do so. Neither could he give them as full an account of how he came to be out on the lake as he knew they desired.

Finally, just before his departure, fearing some of the incidents of the rescue, coupled with his name, might get into the papers, he took the commander aside; and, telling him enough to show him the need of

secrecy in the matter, begged him to say nothing of what had transpired, and to enjoin the same silence on the men.

When he would not consent to remain until morning, the commander directed one of the crew to accompany him to the city; for it could be seen that the detective was still in a weak and shaky condition, notwithstanding his assertions that his strength had entirely returned.

Chicago Charlie was afterward grateful for this favor.

They had but just left the Exposition grounds, and were in the neighborhood of the new hotels that crowd it so thickly on the north, when Chicago Charlie, uttering a low cry, grasped the arm of his companion and reeled back in manifest alarm.

"What is it?" was the instant question.

"There! There! Don't you see that?" Chicago Charlie demanded, in much trepidation.

"That what?"

"Why, that form?"

"'Twas only a man!"

The form that had so startled him had vanished around a corner.

"Was it a man? Are you sure it was a man?"

"Why, certainly it was a man! What else could it have been?"

The detective did not reply for a moment.

He had beheld again the shape seen that night in the Malcomb residence—the form so much resembling John Malcomb.

"You saw it yourself?" was his enigmatical inquiry.

His companion was much puzzled.

"I reckon that liquor they gave you down at the station's affecting your head! Of course I saw the man. What about it? Did you think you saw anything else?"

"I thought I saw a man that I believe is dead."

"Mebbe he ain't dead, then! Or mebbe it's only a resemblance. Shall we go 'round that way and look for him? Perhaps he's standin' there yet."

"Yes! Yes! If you please. Of course I was mistaken; but the resemblance was most marked."

"Nothing so very strange about that. I've run across a good many things like that. There was my old chum, Jim Welch, that died of a fever six years ago. I thought I saw him one night. The light was about like this. To make sure, I hunted the fellow up that I'd seen, and when I had him face to face he looked no more like Welch than you do."

He was walking with the detective toward the corner where the form had disappeared.

When they reached it, no one was to be seen.

"He was too quick for us!" and Chicago Charlie thought he detected a hidden thrill in the man's words. "I reckon he couldn't have heard us talking and skipped out?"

Chicago Charlie had no answer. He was bewildered. The face and form—for he had seen both distinctly, as he believed—were those of John Malcomb—and yet he knew John Malcomb was dead.

"I don't know what to think of it!" he declared. "It couldn't have been a ghost?"

"Ghost, fiddlesticks!" with a scornful laugh.

"Of course there are no such things. But—"

"It was that liquor you've been taking! I thought they was pouring the truck down you pretty freely. You'll be all right in the morning; and you'll never see any more ghosts, if you shun the tempting bowl."

He laughed again, but his laugh was not merry.

Then they walked on together, without further comment.

Chicago Charlie was not only mystified, he was ill at ease. What did this reappearance mean. Was John Malcomb still in the land of the living in spite of all the evidence to the contrary?

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SHADOW NEAR THE WHARF.

It was daylight, when Chicago Charlie found himself again in the city; and one of his first acts was to seek the office of the police inspector.

The inspector had long retired; and when the Columbian Detective discovered he was not to be found at his office, he went to his residence.

The inspector was intensely interested in the story Chicago Charlie had to tell.

"We'll make a move on them!" he declared, at the same time announcing his readiness for the work of the morning. "We'll have the Youngblood place surrounded, and then we'll call on them to surrender, and at the same time bring you forward. Of course, they think you dead!"

The storm had worn itself out; in fact the rain had ceased to fall before Chicago Charlie left the life-saving station. But the clouds still hung heavily, and the wind was not yet entirely still.

The streets were in a disagreeable condition, when the two men walked away from the inspector's home.

Early as was the hour, it was thought the best time for the contemplated raid; and a number of good men were summoned for this service.

But when the Malcomb residence was reached and the cordon was drawn, it was discovered to the intense chagrin of the would-be captors that the net was empty. The Youngbloods had been given warning, in some singular manner, and had fled. The only other tenable supposition was that, fearing suspicion would fall on them should the detective be found dead, they had thought it wise to make a change of location.

It was a most disagreeable surprise, and no man was more pained than the inspector.

He had thought to catch Youngblood, produce the detective, and force from Youngblood a confession by threats. He had known the plan to work well in many cases.

There was nothing more for Chicago Charlie to do but to return to his room and seek his bed.

Some good men were instructed to make a search of the city for the Youngbloods, and to report any discovery promptly: and with this he was forced to be content.

He was worn out. The toils and the excitements of the day and night, with the perils, had told heavily on him.

But even though he so badly needed rest, he could not immediately fall asleep. Thoughts of that vision of John Malcomb intruded.

He remained closely closeted in his room throughout the day and far into the coming night, receiving reports from the police who were making a vain search for the Youngbloods, and wondering why he did not hear from Billy Stubbs.

About midnight Billy came into the room, in a state of great excitement.

"I've been lookin' for you ever'where!" he asserted. "In all the places you told me to look, when I wanted you in a hurry!"

"And I left word for you to come up here!"

"Well, I didn't git it! Say, there's more stuff comin' in to-night, and Zel Magruder's gone out ag'in. I seen him in a boat—a sail-boat—and noticed which way he was headin'. Nell tol' me las' night that the big cargo 'ud come in to-night!"

"Nell?"

"Yes; the ole Gypsy woman!"

Then, in reply to Chicago Charlie's rapid fire of questions, he told of the occurrences in the Gypsy tent and of what Gypsy Nell had said to him.

As may well be imagined, the relation held for the detective great interest; and when he was told of Zel's words, showing that Daisy Malcomb was alive, his joy was deep, even though it was tinged with fear.

But the revelation deepened, instead of clearing away the mystery of her disappearance. If she were in the power of the Lakeside Leaguers, as Magruder's words would seem to indicate, why had she written her lover that queer letter?

Chicago Charlie felt sure there was a reasonable explanation, but he had to confess it was not discoverable. He could only wait the natural processes of time for the solving of the problem.

There was work, now, to do, and no time for dreaming and speculation. Billy had said that Zel had put out into the lake, and that a cargo of smuggled goods was coming in that night.

Therefore, Chicago Charlie deemed it his present duty to visit Captain Stebbins, on the revenue cutter, and acquaint him with the facts known.

"Where is Rackstraw?" he inquired of the newsboy.

But Bill knew no more of the whereabouts of Rackstraw than did Chicago Charlie.

"I expect he's making good use of that season pass to Buffalo Bill's Wild West," the detective averred. "Well, we'll have to get along without him, for we haven't time to look him up."

Billy had withheld nothing, as will be seen by this reference to the Wild West.

As the nearest station was that of the Illinois Central, they made their way to that, immediately on leaving the detective's room, and were soon being whirled toward the Fair grounds.

Although the hour was so late, they found no trouble in gaining admission, as the man on

duty at the entrance chanced to know Chicago Charlie.

They did not tarry in the grounds, but went straight to the Andrew Johnson, which was lying in its usual place beside the wharf.

They found Captain Stebbins on board, and to him the detective quickly recounted Billy's story.

"This is important!" the captain declared.

"What was the direction taken by Magruder?" This last to Billy.

The newsboy spy gave him the desired information.

A few more words were said, and then the captain walked away to give the necessary orders for immediate sailing.

"We'll lie out in the lake, along the track the smugglers will be most likely to take coming in, and maybe we can sight them," he explained, speaking again to Chicago Charlie. "It may be we'll have some fun yet, before the night is over. I'd like much to get sight of those scoundrels. They've been worrying me for the past two months, and all efforts to bag them have failed."

He hurried away again to hasten the preparations for departure; and Chicago Charlie, having nothing to do but wait, walked slowly and thoughtfully toward the rear of the vessel, leaving the newsboy to his own devices.

That Billy Stubbs was abundantly able to care for himself, and to extract profit and amusement out of seemingly poor materials, he had had abundant proof.

The detective could not get his mind away from the mysteries that were puzzling him; and he wanted to be alone to think of the woman who was dearer to him than life, and who was probably in great distress, if not in great peril.

Leaning on the rail and looking over the strip of water that lay between the vessel and the shore, he reflected on all the strange events of the past few days.

Of the disappearance of Daisy, and the queer letter; and of the even more mysterious reappearance of John Malcomb.

But, thinking it all over, and passing in review the evidences gathered in the office of John Malcomb, he felt sure that John Malcomb could not be among the living.

Caught by this later tangle, Chicago Charlie had partially neglected the search to which at first he had given his whole energies! The search for Malcomb's murderer.

It will be remembered he had believed that the murder had been committed by a woman. He had drifted from that theory, and now held that the murder had been committed by the Gypsy, Zel Magruder.

The proofs were strong:

Magruder was feminine in his general appearance. His hands and feet were as small as those of the average woman. He was in every essential effeminate. His voice was not that of a man; though it did not sound like the voice of a woman! Billy had compared to it to the squeak of a rat; and the comparison was good.

Chicago Charlie reasoned that Magruder had induced his sweetheart, the Ghawazee, to visit Daisy Malcomb, under the pretense of wishing to tell her fortune, and to abstract some implement by which the murder might be committed. He had done that, to throw suspicion on Daisy Malcomb; and had left those feminine impressions of hand and feet for the same purpose.

The Ghawazee was a Gypsy. Gypsy Nell had said so, and Chicago Charlie's study of the girl's face made him believe Nell's statement true.

The Ghawazees were a sort of Gypsies, but this particular dancing-girl was not that kind of a Gypsy; but a real Gypsy: a Gypsy from the land of the Pharos; just as Nell and Magruder and the others of the Gypsy encampment were Gypsies from England. A Gypsy is a Gypsy the world over, and the widely-separated bands, usually speaking a Gypsy patois, consider themselves blood of one blood, and are constant in their declarations that "blood is thicker than water."

Hence the friendship that had grown up between the Ghawazee and Magruder, which was ripening, or had ripened, into love. This explained how Zel might have been able to induce her to visit Daisy and steal away the knife.

There were other proofs that Zel Magruder was the murderer of John Malcomb. Magruder was a member of the Lakeside League, the band owing allegiance to Solon Youngblood. This band had been systematically bleeding Selwyn Fisher.

John Malcomb had assisted in this bleeding process, as the detective could not doubt. Chicago Charlie was even not sure that John Malcomb had not been a member of the Lakeside League, though he was naturally loth to think it.

At any rate, his shadowings had made him aware of the fact that Malcomb, if killed by Magruder, had been killed by the instigation of the band—or at the instigation of Solon Youngblood. For he had come on proof showing that Malcomb had declared he would assist in bleeding the Englishman no longer, and that, if

the thing was not stopped, he would warn Fisher of how he was being daily and nightly robbed.

Chicago Charlie did not know if a twinge of conscience had made John Malcomb take this stand, or whether there had been some other reason. He had only stumbled on the main fact by overhearing a talk between Youngblood and one of the Leaguers.

The inference was natural, he thought, that Youngblood, not wishing to have such a "sucker" as Selwyn Fisher slip through his fingers, and probably enraged at Malcomb, had sought Malcomb's death, and induced Magruder to become the active instrument.

Once or twice already, Chicago Charlie had been on the point of placing Magruder under arrest for the murder; and no doubt would have done so had not the disappearance of Daisy come to turn his thoughts into a new channel.

The evidences that Malcomb had been murdered by Zel Magruder were strong;—but what did they weigh, if the form now twice seen were Malcomb's?

If Malcomb was alive, then he had not been killed, Zel Magruder was not his murderer; the Ghawazee had not stolen the knife with the intention ascribed!

Chicago Charlie's head seemed to spin round, as he strove to follow the conclusions to their logical ending:

There had been no dead man lying in a pool of blood in that office; Daisy was not fatherless; John Malcomb had not been buried; there was no bloody knife; there had been no bloody writing on the wall!

He clutched the rail to steady himself. If he could not believe these things, which he had seen with his own eyes, and which so many others had seen, what could he believe? He could not believe in his own identity!

Not only did he clutch the rail, but he put one hand to his head, and stared at the waves; a low cry at the same time breaking from his lips.

A boat had shot out from the land and was gliding along the wharf.

In that boat was the form seen on two previous occasions—the form of John Malcomb.

His low cry and startling attitude attracted the attention of a sailor.

"What is it, mate?" was the sympathetic question.

"There! There! Do you not see that!" the detective cried, his agitation so intense that his words trembled.

The words had swept beyond the limits of the vessel, and might possibly have been heard by the occupant of the boat.

There was a smaller craft lying between the Andrew Johnson and the main shore, and into the shadow of this craft the boat swung, vanishing before the sailor got a really good view of it.

"Will you have a boat lowered?" Chicago Charlie requested. "I must see who that was. Lower away a boat quick! For God sake, make haste!"

It was known by all that the detective was on board as the confidential guest and friend of the captain; therefore, when this appeal was shrieked at them, the sailor and his companions lowered a boat, leaping into it at once and grasping the oars.

The excited detective was not a moment behind them; and under his commands, they pulled out for the point where the other boat had been seen to disappear.

But when the place had been gained, nothing was to be seen. The little boat and its occupant had vanished.

Satisfied that he must be somewhere in the vicinity, Chicago Charlie urged a thorough search; but, when it was made, the crew had to confess themselves beaten.

Neither boat nor man could be found.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A STIRRING CHASE.

LIKE a bird of prey hovering on the crest of the waves, lay the Andy Johnson.

She was far out in the lake, on the path which it was hoped would be taken by the smuggler.

All were alert on board the Andy Johnson, though no lights gleamed. The men were at their places; the small brass guns had been run out; and every preparation made for a chase or a fight.

A chase was what was anticipated, should the smuggler be sighted, for it was not believed the latter would make much resistance.

Yet there were very few on board who believed the night would bring anything but disappointment. To many it seemed the wild of wild-geese chases. Zel Magruder, who was said to be going to warn the smugglers and convey them information, had been seen to sail in that direction; and had been watched by the newsboy until lost to sight nearly a mile from land.

But what did that indicate? The straight sail out into the lake might have been but a ruse. The information that Zel was going to meet the smugglers might even have been false!

Nevertheless, the well-trained crew stood at

their places, ready to obey the commands of their officers.

Though the night was dark it was star-lit.

Captain Stebbins, pacing to and fro uneasily, stopped every few seconds and swept the surface of the lake with his glass.

The fires had been banked, but were ready to be stirred into life in an instant. Therefore, no smoke came from the funnel of the revenue vessel to stream out like a warning flag.

There were probably none on board so excited as Chicago Charlie and his boy second. The capture of the smuggler meant much to them. To Chicago Charlie it probably meant the rescue of Daisy Malcomb, and the unraveling of the whole chain of mysteries surrounding her and her father.

A warning command came from Captain Stebbins. He had seen something—some sloop or ship—though just what, he was not yet ready to say.

A tightening of mental tension might have been observable in all the crew. Still, scarcely any one moved.

"It is a sloop," the captain declared, whispering to his second in command.

Then he passed the glass to the man for a verification of the discovery.

The vessel was seen to be bowling along easily. She carried an immense spread of canvas; but, stood well up to the work, showing that she was staunch and dry, as well as a fast sailer.

Information of the characteristics of the sloop went quickly round, whispered from mouth to mouth. All hoped the vessel might prove to be the smuggler.

It was plain the revenue cutter, lying low in the water and having a black and indistinct outline, had not been seen by the stranger.

The fires were unbanked and the steamer moved forward, but at reduced speed.

If the sloop were a smuggler, the fact would now soon be made manifest.

It was made manifest in a very few minutes. Captain Stebbins, watching her closely and suspiciously, discerned evidence of excitement on board of her, as soon as the black streamer of smoke from the steamer became visible to the sloop's officers and crew.

Still, the sloop held on her way for a time, probably thinking the Andy Johnson might be only a peaceful merchantman.

Then she was observed to alter her course.

This was interpreted as an expression of caution, and even of fear; it being reasoned by the captain and officers that the sloop had changed its tack to make the steamer show her character. If the steamer was a revenue vessel, a chase would ensue, or at any rate she would tack to intercept the sloop.

"We'll make her uncover!" the captain grimly announced.

Then the course of the Andy Johnson was altered a couple of points; and, when the sloop was seen to bear still further away, one of the bright brass guns bellowed out its compliments, commanding her to lie to.

Instead of doing this, the sloop was observed to be crowding on more canvas, and to be bearing further and further away.

There could be no doubt now, of her character, no doubt she was the smuggler Zel Magruder had set out to warn; no doubt that she believed the steamer to be a vessel of the revenue service!

The excitement on board the Andy Johnson leaped at a bound to fever pitch. Every eye was strained across the starlit spaces, every heart beat in anticipation, every nerve was tense and tingling; yet each man stood obediently in his place, awaiting the time for action.

Chicago Charlie and Billy Stubbs stood near the captain's side, in the forward part of the vessel. Chicago Charlie was painfully calm; Billy Stubbs wildly exuberant.

"Will we git 'er!" Billy whispered, as the steamer was felt to forge swiftly through the water, under the propulsion of her powerful engines. "D'ye reckon we'll git 'er?"

As he said it, he danced up and down, glancing at the detective and at the lake, unmindful, much of the time, that many of his numerous questions remained unanswered.

The steamer was now moving at great speed—and she was accounted a fast vessel—but rapidly as she moved, it was noticeable that she gained very little on the sloop.

The latter, with its immense spread of canvas, was proving herself a remarkable sailer. She looked not unlike an immense sea gull, or white-winged night bird, as she glided on over the slightly-ruffled bosom of the lake. The breeze was stiff enough to fill her sails, but not sufficiently so to make her heel over, and thus she stood well up under every stitch of canvas that could be set.

The steamer's fires were fed until they roared like small infernos, and the smoke streaming from her funnel was thick, and black as soot. The ponderous engines racked her from stem to stern; and at every quivering stroke she seemed to leap through the sea; but her utmost energies did not serve to lessen the distance between the vessels.

The sloop was holding straight up the lake, with the wind astern; and, having several hun-

dred miles of good sailing ground before her, it was evident the chase was not soon to end.

Chicago Charlie looked grave, and Captain Stebbins' usually good-humored face harbored a most fierce visaged scowl. Affairs were not progressing to suit either.

"Do you think we'll git 'er?" Billy again asked, pulling at the detective's hand.

"That depends!" and Chicago Charlie declined for the moment to look down on the boy. "If something breaks on board the sloop and nothing on the steamer, or if the wind comes up so the sloop can't carry so much sail; or—we'll git 'er, if we git 'er! That's as much as I can tell you!"

Billy Stubbs needed no plainer answer to tell him that the chances of overhauling the sloop were of the slenderest.

Still, the fires were fed, the engines kept at full speed, and the men remained at their posts.

Now and then a gun was fired, in the vain hope of striking the spars or cordage of the sloop and crippling her.

"She's the witch of the lake!" Stebbins averred, speaking to the detective. "See how she shows us her heels!"

The words were those of admiration, for Stebbins was an enthusiast on the score of fast sailing.

"See her walk along! Do you know, Clingstone! I'd give a pile of money to be able to own that sloop! She's as fast as they make 'em, and she's a beauty!"

He took up the glass again and scanned the sloop carefully, noting the details of her construction and rigging.

Then he began to fret and fume, consumed by his inability to overtake her.

"Confound it, the Government never gives us anything faster than a tug-boat. It's a shame!"

The chance that Chicago Charlie hoped for did not come. Nothing broke on the sloop, nor did the wind arise sufficiently to make her shorten sail. Within an hour she had left the steamer away behind; and in another hour the captain's glass could nowhere reveal her.

The stirring chase had ended in signal failure.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FIGHT IN THE FERRIS WHEEL.

JACK RACKSTRAW, disconsolate, with no friends or acquaintance anywhere discoverable, found himself in front of the ungainly monstrosity known as the Ferris Wheel. He had sought everywhere for Billy Stubbs and Chicago Charlie; he had sought everywhere for some of the sailors from the Andy Johnson. The Andy Johnson was not in position at the wharf, and no one could tell him whither she had gone.

"Beats all!" he avowed, speaking, perhaps, to the wheel, for he was looking at it. He was not referring to the wheel, however; though a bystander might have thought so.

The Ferris Wheel, from which a bird's-eye view may be had of the entire Exposition, is somewhat to the Columbian World's Fair what the Eiffel Tower was to that of Paris. Visitors are carried two hundred and sixty feet into the air, in cars similar to railway coaches in construction.

Jack Rackstraw had no special desire to go whirling round on this great pin-wheel, but a lack of something else to do caused him to enter one of the cars. It was at the time unoccupied.

Two ladies soon came in, however, and after them a gentleman. Rackstraw scarcely perceived them, for he was looking down Midway Plaisance. Had he but glanced at the man, his interest in his fellow passengers might have quickened.

The great wheel began to revolve. Still, Rackstraw paid no heed to the trio, but looked out on the queer buildings and queerer people of Midway.

Up, up they went, seemingly into the clouds, until the whole region round about unfolded itself like a map.

Rackstraw uttered an exclamation of admiration.

Instantly the man bent on him a glance, which was dull and unquestioning at first, but which speedily kindled into rage.

The man was the Englishman, Selwyn Fisher. Fisher had evidently been making a fool of himself in more ways than one. Excessive drink had made his eyes stupid and heavy, as well as bloodshot, and his puffy cheeks were puffier than ever; while his rotundity had enormously increased. He seemed even then suffering from a too free indulgence in spirits, or from alcoholism. His hands shook, his gaze was uncertain and wavering, and his suddenly-kindled anger had in it something suggestive of delirium tremens.

Rackstraw was giving him no heed, and only looked up when a cry from one of the women came as a warning.

Fisher had arisen unsteadily, pitched across the car like a boat reeling under the influence of the sea, and now made a dash at Rackstraw with a keen knife.

"Whatever are you up to?" Rackstraw de-

manded, warding off the blow and getting on his feet.

"Hi know you, you 'ound!" the Englishman gurgled, again lifting the knife. "You 'ave followed me enough, Hi tell you!"

It was plain he recognized Rackstraw, and believed him to be an enemy; though at first Rackstraw did not know who the Englishman was, so greatly had the latter changed.

"You mean to 'ave me barrested, do you?" lunging with the knife. "You think me ha murderer, do you? Hi will be, Hi tell you, before Hi'm through!"

"Stand off, you scoundrell!" the sailor roared, again brushing aside the knife and giving the Englishman a stinging blow. "Stand off, or I'll knock you out of the car!"

The women had sprung up in fright and were screaming.

It was an exciting and novel situation; this fight in the car of the Ferris Wheel, more than two hundred feet above the earth.

The screams of the women were heard on the ground below, and drew all eyes upward. The fact that such a fight was in progress seemed to become instantly known, for a surging crowd of excited humanity collected on the moment.

With his ardor in nowise dampened by Rackstraw's stinging blow, which had purpled one of his cheeks, Fisher again lifted the knife, swaying most unsteadily.

At this the sailor's blood came up.

"Take that, will you!" he said, delivering another right-hander.

Then, clutching the knife hand of his assailant, the two came to the floor in a struggling heap.

The Englishman fought like a tiger, striving again and again to free the hand and deliver a blow with the knife; and for a time it was as much as Rackstraw could do to keep him from accomplishing this purpose.

The crowd below was roaring out its excitement; and the women, cowering in one end of the car, were uttering little, terrified screams.

All the while the car was descending, with its even, unjolting motion.

Getting a firm clasp of Fisher's massive throat, Rackstraw crushed it with his powerful grip, until the waving knife-hand ceased its eccentric and threatening movement, and the Englishman's face began to change from purple to bluish black.

"You infernal scoundrell!" Rackstraw hissed, taking a good look at the discolored face and recognizing the man. "I ought to kill you fer that!"

The fight seemed to have developed in him an unexpected ferocity. Usually kindhearted, he appeared to have been changed by this encounter into a man of tigerish inclinations.

He drew Fisher half erect, by an immense exertion of muscular power, and held him thus for a moment, as if he contemplated hurling him through the nearest window.

Then his grasp relaxed and his face brightened. He let the limp form slip to the floor.

"Bah, I'm a fool! You did make me most thunderin' mad, though. What in the dickens did ye mean by jumpin' onto me that way? I've never been botherin' you!"

A reply was not expected, for Fisher was too nearly senseless to make any.

Then the car reached the earth, the crowd surged forward, and Rackstraw turned toward a police officer, who had elbowed his way in.

One of the women had fainted.

"Have some one take care of her," Rackstraw requested. "Then, I'm ready to go with you. Hain't done nothin' that I'm ashamed of. That feller jumped onto me with a knife. I wouldn't let him stick me. That's all!"

Other policemen advanced, and Rackstraw left the car in charge of one of them.

With some difficulty Fisher was helped out, and placed in an ambulance. Then a Columbian Guide sprang away to clear a path for the ambulance, whose warning gong was already sounding; and almost before Selwyn Fisher knew what had occurred he was lying on one of the clean, white beds in the hospital sub-station on Midway Plaisance.

On examination he was found to have no injuries of a serious character, though the severe choking had left him temporarily helpless.

When dismissed from the hospital, which dismissal occurred about half an hour later, he found himself under arrest for his attempt on the life of Jack Rackstraw, and was borne away to a police station.

There Rackstraw, who had followed, again met him.

Rackstraw was anxious to get at the reason of his strange conduct; and was not a little mystified when Fisher raved out, almost as soon as his eyes fell on the sailor's face:

"Why 'ave you sent me 'ere? Hi did not kill John Malcomb! Hi'm an innocent man, sir!"

"Who in Jeremiah ever said you did kill him?" Rackstraw demanded.

The sailor knew of John Malcomb's murder, certainly, but he had not been made acquainted with all the developments of Chicago Charlie's shadowing.

"Why ham Hi 'ere then, sir? Hi tell you Hi'm innocent! Why 'ave you been 'ounding me?"

His excitement grew every moment; until Rackstraw saw that, if the conversation was continued, another fight would be precipitated.

"Crazy as a loon!" was his comment.

Then he turned away, considerably puzzled, and with mingled feelings of pity and disgust.

It was plain to him that Fisher was on the borderland of that terrible form of insanity induced by alcoholic indulgence.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

RACKSTRAW IN THE TOILS OF CUPID.

CHICAGO CHARLIE walked with earnest tread along the street toward the kindergarten establishment, kept now by Miss Lilly Lilac. He anxiously desired to see Jack Rackstraw, and he thought that the place where the sailor was most likely to be found.

The Andy Johnson had returned from its short and unsuccessful cruise; and Billy Stubbs had been again assigned the task of shadowing the wily Gypsy, Zel Magruder.

The mystery of the murder of John Malcomb—if he had been murdered!—and the disappearance of Daisy, oppressed Chicago Charlie like an unpleasant dream.

Just now he was thinking of the statement of Gypsy Nell, that somewhere on the Michigan shore the smugglers had established a "den."

If that den could be found, these mysteries might be laid bare. Could it be found? No doubt it was in a secluded and hidden place, not easily discoverable, and seldom visited by man. Rackstraw was familiar with the shores of the great lake. Possibly Rackstraw could assist in determining its location.

This was the thought impelling the detective, as he strode up the street.

But no thought was further, at that moment, from the mind of Jack Rackstraw.

Rackstraw had been caught in the toils of Cupid. He was a lover, "sighing like furnace." Sitting on a small drygoods box, which Miss Lilly had covered with a crazy-patchwork cushion, he awkwardly caressed his chin with the fingers of his right hand, and stared first at the girl and then at the Infant Wonder.

The children had long departed for their respective homes; or, rather, each individual mother or elder sister had come for the child in which she was most interested and had borne it away, made happy by the fact that the day's toil was ended and that that particular Infant Wonder was to gladden the little room or cottage through the quickly-speeding hours of the night.

All had been pleased that Mrs. Tonguegrass had gone out and Miss Lilly Lilac had come in, for there was as much difference in the two women as there is between the taste of acid cider and the pleasant sweet of an orange. Miss Lilac was held in great favor by the children and the patrons of this institution.

Perhaps no one thought more of her than did the Infant Wonder, or took more pains to show it than he, except—Jack Rackstraw.

Miss Lilly called him the biggest baby of the lot; and it must be confessed that if Rackstraw could have had his way, and had not been ashamed to do so infantile a thing, he would probably have enrolled himself as one of the Infant Wonders and remained there as many hours out of each twenty-four as the rules of the institution allowed.

Truly, Jack Rackstraw was in the toils of Cupid.

"I say, Miss Lilly, you wouldn't want to adopt twins, now?" and Rackstraw made a grab at the Infant Wonder and drew him to his side. "Hyer's two of us, and we're a hand to draw to. The knave and the king! Hain't it a strong hand? Well, if it ain't, you won't lose anything in a game of hearts. What do you say?"

Rackstraw was getting his references slightly mixed, perhaps; but he was sure Miss Lilly could not misunderstand him.

"I reckon you're the knave, Jack Rackstraw," and the girl jabbed the needle into the sewing in a vicious manner.

Rackstraw laughed.

"Likely I am. 'I'm willin' to be most anything, Miss Lilly, and will call myself anything in the world if—"

He looked at her shyly.

"If what?"

He seemed to hesitate about replying, and churned the Infant Wonder up and down in a vigorous manner, probably to hide the flush that had come unbidden to his tanned cheeks.

Miss Lilly gave the sewing another savage stab.

"If you'd only call me— Oh, dod rot it! of course you wouldn't!—if you'd only call me—husband!"

Miss Lilly laughed outright, for Rackstraw had squeaked the important word in a most awful and suggestive manner. Not only did Miss Lilly laugh, but Miss Lilly blushed redder than the reddest rose.

What she might have answered may not be known; for, at that moment, a step was heard mounting the stair; and Miss Lilly, blushing

furiously, quickly caught up her sewing; and Rackstraw, lifting the Infant Wonder high in air, began to waltz crazily about the room.

Then there came a knock on the door; and when Miss Lilly, striving vainly to hide a very red and suspicious-looking face, opened it, the Columbian Detective stood on the threshold.

If Chicago Charlie suspected anything of the real state of the case—and it is very likely that he did—he managed very well to hide the suspicion. Indeed, his words and manner were so natural that Miss Lilly soon forgot her blushes, and Rackstraw ceased his waltzing and put down the Infant Wonder to hear what the Columbian Detective might have to say.

"You should have been with us last night," Chicago Charlie began, accepting the chair Miss Lilly placed for him, and directing his words to Rackstraw. "We had a lively chase after a vessel of the Leaguers. But she cleared out, leaving us badly. It is thought the smugglers have a den in a cove someyhere on the Michigan shore."

The statements were of a character to make Rackstraw almost forget the disappointment he had felt at the coming of Chicago Charlie. He could say those words to Miss Lilly Lilac again—and he resolved he would at the first opportunity—and keep saying them until he had received an answer—an affirmative answer.

"We were sorry you were not alone, but we couldn't find you!"

Then Chicago Charlie rehearsed the saying of Gypsy Nell concerning Zel Magruder and the den of the smugglers. He also told of the ghostly manifestations, and of how he was puzzled by them.

Rackstraw could throw no light on this latter mystery; neither could Lilly Lilac, who trembled at the merest mention of ghosts.

"As to that there cove or den I 'low I know jist where it is! At least, I know of several sich places, any of which could be used in that way. I've calculated all along that Youngblood's sellers were bringin' them things from north'ards; but they could bring 'em from Michigan jist as well, likely. Likely easier; though they'd have to carry 'em across the peninsula—an' that's a thing I shouldn't think they'd want to do. Perhaps they believe it's the safest way. Tany rate, I kin take ye to them coves, or I kin pilot the vessel to 'em. Which way was the sloop holdin' when ye seen her last?"

Chicago Charlie gave him the desired information, or as nearly as he could.

"I thought she might 'a' took the back track, but she didn't! The coves don't lay that away."

Miss Lilly jumped again, being still nervous from the start given them by the Columbian Detective. Another footstep was heard coming up the stairs!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FLASHING OF A RING.

BILLY STUBBS was again sprawled in the shadows of the buildings of the Cairo street.

But a few feet away, and dimly revealed by the light from an electric lamp, sat Zel Magruder and the Ghawazee.

He had seen them come out of one of the buildings, and had succeeded in diving into the shadows in time to escape discovery.

Much of their conversation was carried on in a Gypsy patois, difficult of speech for both. Zel was more familiar with English, the language of the country of his nativity and of his adoption, and the dancing-girl spoke better than any other the dialect of the land of the Pyramids and the Sphinx. Hence they occasionally, because it pleased Zel to do so, dropped into English;—which was much to Billy's delight, for the boy felt that if they kept up their "gibberish," as he called it, he would be no wiser when he went away than when he came.

"Unless you can go with me I will have to leave you, Malma!" he heard the Gypsy say, in squeaky tones that were intended to be affectionate. "I have got to leave the city!"

Her reply was a carcass of pleading tenderness.

"I have got to 'git up and git'! as they say in this country."

"Why shall you leaf me?" was the inquiry.

"Well, hang it, Malma! you'd ought to know. That John Malcomb job, for one thing!"

Billy Stubbs, watching with the keen sight of a rat, thought he observed a shudder convulse her.

"They've been after me for that, all the while, as I've told you," Zel went on. "And have made it confounded unpleasant fer me, too, I can tell you. These officers air regular blood-hounds, when they air to trackin' a feller. They're perty shore to pull me for that, one of these days, if I don't cut out. So you see, I've got to go."

"I hate to leave Chicago most mighty, while the World's Fair is on and there's such a money to be made, but it ain't my choice!"

"Oh! ef you had not that dearn!" she murmured. "I warn you, you know. I to you say, you know. If you-a that man had, you would have what you call—tro—tro. That what I say."

"How many more times you goin' to tell me that, Malma? Zel growled. "You're 'most as bad as Nell. I 'low I was a fool for doin' a job of that kind; but it's done, now, an' can't be undone."

"That ain't the only thing, though, that's going to make me leave Chicago. I've been spotted in that other business. That infernal boy—blast 'im—has been after me again! He must 'a' tracked me out into the lake last night; though I thought I'd shorely throwed him off my track, when I took that cat-boat of Westover's, what I'd never used before."

"But he spotted the cat-boat, just as he had done the others, and he put the officers onto my little game. Consequence was, they come mighty nigh scoopin' in the sloop. Curse him, anyway! And now the boss says I'd better clear out fer awhile."

"The boss is skeered, you see, and he's afeared to have me hangin' 'round any more. I used to be the mascot of the gang; now it seems I'm the Jony! Hang it all, anyway!"

The Ghawazee was much impressed by this account, and by Zel's manifest danger; and she was not backward in showing the fact. And Zel, pleased by this exhibition of affection, continued in the same tone:

"Yes, I've got to cut out; an' what I'm worryin' 'bout most, is the leavin' of you. Some o' these here Columbian guides or guards will be waitin' to run off with you, I'm afeared."

"Does my little crocodile loaf bees dancin' girl?" she playfully asked, tapping his whiskerless cheeks. "Does he loaf her eez I loaf the Nile?"

"You may bet that I jist do!" Zel averred.

Never before had he succeeded in gaining the heart of any member of the gentler sex, and it tickled him immensely. All previous attempts in that direction, and they had not been few, had been scornfully regarded, because of his scant stature and "romanish" appearance.

"You jist bet I do, my red rose of Egypt!" he avowed. "There ain't ary girl in this whole Chicago that I'd turn my finger over to get, exceptin' of you!"

Zel was slightly treading on the domains of falsehood, in making this sweeping statement, for there was more than one girl in Chicago on whom he had looked with adoring eyes, and who, by a slight nod, might have brought him to her feet. But Zel had never regarded the truth highly, when a lie served him better.

"I love you well enough, to want you to go with me, when I cut out o' here!" he asserted. "Do you think you—"

The rest of the sentence was spoiled for Billy by Zel's attempt to snatch a kiss.

The question and reply must have been eminently satisfactory, however, for a moment later Billy Stubbs saw him produce an odd-looking ring and slip it on the girl's finger.

Billy's eyes opened wide with renewed interest. He knew he had seen that ring, or its counterpart; but for the moment he could not recall where.

The Ghawazee looked pleasedly at the shining bauble, turning it round and round on her finger to the better admire its beauty.

It was a handsome ring, of queer design. Of engraven gold, it held two clasped hands upbearing a broken heart. In the center of the heart, like a drop of blood, was a ruby. In addition, the ring was massive and suggestive of oriental workmanship.

Where had he seen that ring?

Again and again the question came to torment the boy, as he listened to the further talk of the lovers.

"That means that you will go with me!" said Magruder, bending on her a tender look. "That's what it means, don't it? You may let I want you to bad enough!"

"Where the Ghawazee's heart is, she will-a there go!" the girl asserted, with burning cheeks and bright eyes. "With her crocodile she will-a go!"

"That'll be our weddin' ring!" said Zel, beamingly. "I do no' who the bu'sted heart b'longs to, but youn and mine'll be the clasped hands."

Like a flash came to Billy Stubbs the recollection of where and under what circumstances he had seen that ring—no, not that ring—he was sure it could not be the same; but another like it, which was its mate.

Daisy Malcomb had had such a ring, and John Malcomb another.

He had seen Daisy wearing her ring once, when he had been sent to her home with a note by the Columbian Detective; and its queer design had then impressed him. But in the excitement of more recent things he had forgotten all about it.

He had casually spoken of this ring to the detective; and then Chicago Charlie had told that there was another like it, that belonged to Daisy's father, but which was missing when Malcomb was found dead.

Had this ring, now on the Ghawazee's finger, been taken from the hand of John Malcomb or from that of his daughter?

Daisy, according to Gypsy Nell's statement, was now held by the Leaguers. Being one of them, might not Zel Magruder have taken or stolen it from her?

Billy Stubbs had long believed that Zel Magruder was John Malcomb's murderer.

The ring that had been on Malcomb's finger almost constantly for many months previous to his death had not been there on the morning of the discovery of the murder. What had become of it? Who had taken it?

The more Billy Stubbs thought it over, the stronger grew his belief that the ring which the dancing-girl was admiring was the one that had belonged to Malcomb;—and with this came the added certainty that Zel Magruder was Malcomb's slayer.

"I've got to git to Chicago Charlie with this hyer little item!" Billy told himself, anxious now to be up and gone. "If he could ketch 'em with that ring, it'd be a stunner! I wish't Magruder would git a move on him!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

CROWDED INTO A CORNER.

THE footstep on the stairway, which so startled Lilly Lilac, was that of Billy Stubbs.

Zel Magruder had failed to "get a move on him;" but Billy Stubbs, unwilling to remain longer in the Cairo Street, had succeeded in extricating himself without alarming the Gypsy lovers. He had not done it without difficulty, nor without much sly crawling and creeping; but he had accomplished it, and now he was searching for Chicago Charlie.

When admitted into the room, his eyes were shining with excitement and it was very evident he had a story to tell.

He told it quickly; and there was an immediate adjournment of the meeting in that upper room of the kindergarten establishment. Lilly Lilac and the Infant Wonder remained; and Chicago Charlie, Jack Rackstraw and Billy Stubbs hastened into the street, and as fast as steam would carry them toward the Columbian Exposition.

On reaching the grounds, a number of police officers were collected, and the Cairo Street was entered for the purpose of placing Zel Magruder and the Ghawazee under arrest—the belief and hope being that a confession would be thus forced from one or both of them.

But when the Cairo Street was entered, the birds were found to have flown.

"To the Gypsy camp!" said Chicago Charlie, turning back into Midway and walking toward the nearest exit gate. "Perhaps we may find them there."

It was plain that Magruder had induced the girl to leave her employers and go with him in his flight from the city. Still, there was a chance that they might be found in the Gypsy tent. Zel would probably wish to visit that place before taking a final departure.

The Gypsy camp was approached with great caution, though they found it too large and spread over too much territory for the successful accomplishment of their plans. Chicago Charlie had not a sufficient number of men with him to throw a cordon completely around it.

However, at the suggestion of Billy Stubbs, they approached the tents in the vicinity of the one occupied by Gypsy Nell, for in that neighborhood Magruder had always been found by the boy.

The plan worked to perfection; for Zel Magruder and Malma Nareen, the Ghawazee, were found in the tent of the Gypsy crone, engaged with her in earnest conversation.

Now and then Magruder stopped his talk and made search for some articles, which Malma was tying up in a bundle for him.

The Columbian detective instructed some of the officers to pass to the rear of the tent for the purpose of preventing Zel's escape in that direction; but in executing this movement, Magruder, whose ears were of the keenest, heard them.

Like a flash he leaped to the half-finished bundle, and, seizing it, threw up the tent canvas and bounded out into the night; leaving Malma Nareen and Gypsy Nell bewilderedly staring.

His exclamation had been:

"Scat! I've got to slide!"

Instantly a revolver cracked in the darkness without, startling the women still more.

But Zel Magruder had sped on unbarred; and, in spite of the utmost exertions of the officers, he succeeded in making his escape.

Malma Nareen, much excited and alarmed, was also on the point of flying from the tent, when she was confronted by a number of blue-coated men, who were headed by Chicago Charlie.

She dropped back with a gasp, to the straw seat on which she had been sitting, and her eyes took on a hunted look.

Gypsy Nell turned about with a smile that was hard to fathom.

Blood of the Gypsy blood!" she cackled, bending a glance on Billy Stubbs. "And blood is—is it thicker than water? That's what the Gypsies say!"

She nodded and smiled and courtesied; and, beckoning to the men, said blandly:

"I do not often have the honor of seeing so many gentlemen come to have their fortunes told. One, two, three, four—" running her eyes

over them—"how many dollars will it be to me, anyway! Fifty cents apiece, gentlemen! Fifty cents apiece, for a true, good fortune!"

Her face was wrinkling and puckering, and she continued to courtesy in a most obsequious manner.

"She's a witch!" thought Billy Stubbs.

And, as if she had caught the thought, she declared:

"I'm a witch, gentlemen. The modern Witch of Endor! What is it you would have me show you? Would you see the past, or the dead of the past? Or, do you prefer the future?"

The Ghawazee was twisting and fidgeting uneasily, and edging toward the wall as if she contemplated making a dash for liberty; and Chicago Charlie interrupted the words of Gypsy Nell by pushing hurriedly forward.

"We must place this young lady under arrest," he observed, stepping in front of Malma Nareen and thus interposing to prevent her escape. "We think she will be needed."

At this the dancing-girl sunk down in a cowering heap. At first her attitude had been that of fright, but holding a crouching and subdued fierceness. Now this was changed. The fierceness was swept away by hysterical sobs.

The Columbian Detective stretched out a hand as if he would take her by the arm.

"No! No!" she shrieked, drawing back.

Gypsy Nell cackled aloud.

"Do not harm her, gentlemen. Her heart is like water. It is as soft as that of her beloved crocodile."

There was something so gloating in the words that Chicago Charlie could not but look at the old woman, wondering what she meant.

"We do not intend to harm her," the detective avowed. "We only want to know the truth. If she will tell us what she knows, in answer to our questions, perhaps we will let her go."

The Ghawazee had put up her hands beseechingly, and her attitude and evident distress were extremely touching.

"We don't intend to hurt you," the Columbian Detective reassured. "All you need to do is to answer our questions. What has become of Zel Magruder?"

"I doan' know!" she asserted. "He leaf me!"

"You were going away together?"

She nodded.

"Why?"

"I doan' know."

"But you do know! This boy—" indicating Billy Stubbs—"heard you and him talking to-night, in the Cairo Street. So, you see, there is no use to deny anything; and we'll get along better if you'll just speak the truth."

"Why did Zel Magruder kill John Malcomb?"

This was a random shot, fired at a venture.

Immediately the girl began to cry.

"I doan' know!" she wailed. "I doan' know!"

"Then he killed John Malcomb?"

She did not instantly reply.

Chicago Charlie repeated the inquiry.

"He-a—what you call!—stab-a heem with the knife!"

A look of triumph came to Chicago Charlie's face. This was a confession of moment.

"Where did he get that knife?"

Again she shook with convulsive sobs.

"Oh, I doan' know! I doan' know!"

Chicago Charlie repeated the question, with considerable sternness. He thought he could see why the girl should fear to implicate herself.

"I-a geet it for heem!"

"Ah! you got it for him! Where did you get it? Tell me all about it. It will be the better for you; you needn't fear to tell us."

Still she hesitated.

"Whose knife was it?"

"A woman's knife!"

"Whose?"

"I-a doan' relect the-a name."

"Did you not get the knife from a girl whose fortune you told?"

She nodded an assent.

"And you went there, pretending to want to tell her fortune, for that purpose?"

Again the Ghawazee indicated an affirmative. Gypsy Nell was bending intently forward, one of the most interested of the listeners.

Then, bit by bit, Chicago Charlie forced the confession from the cowering Ghawazee:

It was as he had thought. She had gone to the house of John Malcomb, at the instigation of Zel Magruder, and had there purloined Daisy Malcomb's knife for the bloody deed which Zel purposed to commit.

The dancing-girl was constant in her declarations, however, that she did not know what Magruder wanted to do with the knife, until afterward, or she would not have stolen it for him. She asserted that he had said he wanted it because it was of great value and had been the property of a friend; that he could not purchase it, and that she must thus get it for him.

She had found it lying on the table in Daisy's room, and had abstracted it without difficulty, while Daisy was absorbed in the fortune that was being told her.

Afterward, when it was too late to recall the act, Zel had shown her an account of the mur-

der in the papers, and had confessed to her that he had committed the murder with that knife; to the Ghawazee's great fear and horror, as she averred.

"Where did you get that ring?" the Columbian Detective suddenly questioned, pointing to the ring that glittered on the girl's finger. "It is the ring of the murdered man!"

Instantly Malma Nareen slipped it off and gave it to him.

"Take eet!" she gasped. "I-a veer eet no longer."

She glanced at the ruby and shuddered. Perhaps it was too suggestive of blood—blood murderously spilled.

She was crying again most bitterly; and Chicago Charlie, chancing to look round, saw that Gypsy Nell was rocking herself to and fro in seeming high glee.

The actions of the crone puzzled him, even though he had heard so much from Billy Stubbs concerning her odd character and oddity of manner. He was forced to the conclusion that the occurrences of that hour were extremely pleasing to Nell; and he determined to apply to her the inquisitorial pump, as soon as he found time.

Then he turned back to the Ghawazee, and once more plied her with apparently endless questions.

He found, however, that he had already extracted almost all she knew. She knew very little of the Leaguers, and nothing at all of the location of the den on the Michigan shore. She was in a manner, acquainted with Solon Youngblood, regarding him as Zel's best friend; and had taken the trouble to warn him of peril, whenever she could; and had transmitted messages between him and her lover, for which they had come to the Cairo Street.

But all this did not implicate her in the many crimes committed by the Lakeside League. She had been used as a tool, it was clear; but seemingly as an ignorant tool.

However, Chicago Charlie thought it the part of wisdom to detain her for a further hearing; and placed her in charge of an officer; while he sought to obtain some information from the croaking old Gypsy woman.

The officer was not as alert as he should have been.

He turned to converse with another for a moment, and walked toward the door of the tent.

It was the opportunity long sought by the Ghawazee.

She lifted the flap of the tent, and was outside and speeding away in the darkness, before a hand could be raised to detain her.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE INFANT WONDER HAS AN ADVENTURE.

"I DO NO' as I'll git back," Jack Rackstraw solemnly averred, looking earnestly at Lilly Lilac. "So, if you'd only answer that question I asked you last night?"

Miss Lilly's face, which had been covered alternately with smiles and blushes, darkened with anxiety.

"What do you mean Jack?" she asked.

"Hain't I told ye? I've been runnin' on so, blamed if I know what I have said. Thought I mentioned it, while I was a-tellin' of what happened down at the Gypsies' camp last night!"

They were in the same upper room of the kindergarten, but the time was a night later than that which saw them together there last.

The Infant Wonder, neglected by his sailor crony, was playing near the door that opened on the stairway, building houses out of blocks and knocking them down again in great glee; thus working to as little purpose as some men. But it brought him pleasure, which cannot always be said of the men.

"What do you mean by saying you don't know that you'll get back? Where are you going?" Miss Lilly anxiously inquired.

"That's jist what I was tryin' to explain. You see, the Andy Johnson has been ordered on a cruise, and sails exactly at midnight. Likely there'll be a fight before the cruise is over. Captain Stebbins don't want to put out till that time, because he's afeared of the spies of the Leaguers. He thinks he can make a sneak of it at midnight, and git out without bein' seen."

It always took honest Jack Rackstraw a long time to tell what he had to say; and this was so when he was engaged in conversation with Miss Lilly. Perhaps on this occasion he was slow for a purpose; as his eyes twinkled pleasantly beneath his shaggy brows, when he observed that Miss Lilly had drawn closer to him.

"A fight!" she was gasping. "You don't mean a fight on the lake! A fight with a ship?"

"Mebbe not on the lake. More likely on the shore. More likely, yit, in a cove. I hain't no prophit. Wheres'ever we find them Lakeside Leaguers, there we're a-goin' to jun p onto 'em, teeth an' toenail; and if somebody don't git hurt, then it won't be the fault of the crew of the Andy Johnson. They've worried with them there scoundrels tell they've got their mad up, and would as lief fight as eat, and a good deal liefer!"

He was apparently not looking at Miss Lilly Lilac, yet his pleased glances saw her every attitude.

"So, not knowin' what may come out o' that fight, I says to you that I don't know whether er not I'll git to see you ag'in; an'—well, if you'd only answer that question that I asked you last night!—if you'd only—I'd go 'way feelin' a heap sight better."

Miss Lilly's face was changing from red to pale and from pale to red, though she held it so that Jack Rackstraw could not see it, even by the most intent peering through his bushy eyebrows. But Rackstraw saw that she was twisting nervously at her apron, and that her fingers had a suggestive tremble.

If Jack Rackstraw—the rascal!—could have been soundly thrashed at about that time, probably it would have served him right; for he was making a base pretense of his fears. There was not a braver man on the Andy Johnson than this same Jack Rackstraw, nor a man who thought less of what the results of such a cruise might be. It had even been said of him that he rushed to battle as to a feast.

Yet Jack Rackstraw was a kind-hearted man, not given to blood-thirstiness, nor to vain-glorious boastings. He was naturally a warrior, trained to battle on the seas. Fighting as the warriors of old, for his king and country;—which king and country were the flag and soil of his native land, America.

To do him justice, however, it may be admitted that his love for Lilly Lilac may have made him more than ordinarily concerned on such points; and he may really have felt something of what he was saying.

But his twinkling eyes belied this.

"I'd go 'way feelin' a heap sight better," he continued, "if you'd only answer me that there question?"

The Infant Wonder tumbled down the Tower of Babel at that moment, and Miss Lilly gave the child a grateful look.

"What was the question?" she next innocently asked.

"Why—why—" and a great lump got in Rackstraw's throat and almost choked him. "I—I asked you, if you—if you wouldn't be—if you wouldn't be my—husband?"

Miss Lilly got redder than any beet, stuffed her handkerchief so deeply into her mouth that she could hardly keep from coughing, and shook more violently than ever; while Rackstraw, feeling that he had hopelessly ruined himself and committed a blunder beyond all pardon, was so much mortified that he nearly fell over.

"I'm a dod-rotted idiot!" he at last blurted out, struggling again to the top of the waves that were engulfing him. "I'm a teetotal, flabbergasted oyster without any brains, or a head to put 'em in if I had a bushel. I'm a—"

"What was it you said?" Miss Lilly interrupted, having got the better of her emotions and pulled the handkerchief from her mouth. "What was it you said awhile ago? I didn't get the last of it?"

Miss Lilly, it will be seen, was showing herself quite as violently in love with honest Jack as he was in love with her.

Rackstraw swallowed the lump in his throat and rose still further out of the wrangling flood. If Miss Lilly had not caught that awful—that inexcusable blunder, there was hope yet.

"I said would you—would you be my—wife?"

He dwelt a long time on the final word, to be sure that it was the right one before letting it slip.

"You don't really mean it, Jack!" Miss Lilly protested; and another Tower of Babel fell thunderingly to the floor.

Rackstraw looked up with uncommon boldness, and saw that she was blushing like a peony.

His courage grew with the sight; and, feeling his feet touch the firm earth once more, he clasped her hand and drew her down against his heart.

"Mean it?" he ejaculated, in a high-keyed whisper. "May I be cut into bits and fed to the fishes, if I don't mean every word of it! I want you to marry me, Miss Lilly; an' if you'll only say you will, I'll be the happiest man between the oceans."

His tongue was regaining its fluency.

Whether Miss Lilly was blushing or not, Rackstraw could not tell. She had hidden her face against his breast.

Thinking this a good indication, he drew her closer, in a firm embrace; and was startled by a sob.

"You're not mad at me, Miss Lilly?" he pleaded, his voice shaken by fears.

"Of course not, Jack!"

"What ye cryin' fer, then?"

"Because, Jack, I do love you, and I'll marry you, if you want me to!"

"Hear that, Infant Wonder? Hip! Hip!" The Infant Wonder heard something else, just then, that concerned him more directly.

The door had opened softly, and a man reached over and clasped him about the shoulders and drew him into the stairway.

His frightened yell smote the air, causing Rackstraw and Miss Lilly to spring asunder.

Rackstraw caught a glimpse of the man, with Christopher Columbus Stubbs in his arms. The man was turning about to descend. Then the sailor echoed the cry of the Infant Wonder, and leaped in instant pursuit. Either the man was John Malcomb, or the kidnapper was John Malcomb's ghost.

Rackstraw believed it a veritable man, for ghosts do not usually play such pranks; and, as he leaped for the stairway, the small revolver he carried in a hip pocket came out with a swing.

The "bang" of the weapon quickly followed. The would-be kidnapper had reached the foot of the stairway, and was on the point of bounding into the street.

The shot must have taken effect, for the fellow pitched forward, and the child was dropped, howling, to the floor.

Rackstraw was following the bullet down the stairway, two steps at a time.

It may be that no wound had been made; for, before Rackstraw could reach him, the man scrambled up and plunged headlong into the street.

Christopher Columbus Stubbs was making the air vocal with his screams of fright and indignation, and the voice of Miss Lilly was calling anxiously from the head of the flight.

Unheeding them, Rackstraw bounced through the door, still swinging the revolver.

The street was almost deserted, and the would-be kidnapper was not to be seen.

With a smothered curse, honest Jack retraced his way, picked up the still yelling Infant Wonder, replied as best he could to Miss Lilly's hysterical questions, and toiled up-stairs.

"Ghosts a-ragin' round like that!" he snorted, setting the Wonder down gingerly and looking to see that none of the Stubbs bones were fractured. "Tell that to the marines! John Malcomb's alive this minute, I don't keer a fig what them there Gypsies says."

"But what in the land o' the livin', did he want with Christopher Columbus?"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

IN THE WOODED COVE.

THIS was the sensational and utterly bewildering story that Jack Rackstraw carried to Chicago Charlie on board the Andy Johnson, not an hour later.

Rackstraw had not left Miss Lilly defenseless, however. He had secured a policeman to watch at the foot of the stairs opening on the street, and had left with Miss Lilly the revolver that had been instrumental in saving Christopher Columbus Stubbs from the kidnapping ghost; though Miss Lilly had vowed over and over that she would not—could not—touch the weapon, if a dozen ghosts, on kidnapping bent, should mount the stairs and enter the room.

Not the least excited, when the tale was rehearsed, was Billy Stubbs. It alarmed him for the safety of the Infant Wonder, and so unsettled all his preconceived notions, that he hardly knew whether he was on the deck of a vessel or on the land. Surely, he thought, it could not be!—it could not be possible that John Malcomb was alive.

Sure that the idea was foolish, he fell back on the theory that the man must have been, for some inexplicable reason, disguised to look like John Malcomb.

But why did he seize on the Infant Wonder? To that he could find no reply. It was as unsolvable as the riddles of the ancient Sphinx.

Chicago Charlie's talk with the Gypsy crone had not been barren of results. She had readily told him all she knew, and had given him a roughly-drawn chart of the lake, which she had stolen a few days before from Zel.

It contained some markings that were thought to be routes of the smuggler sloop, and a point was indicated on the Michigan shore that was presumed to represent the "den."

Rackstraw examined the chart with great care, and decided that it was too crude to be of much benefit. It helped in one way, however: by showing that the den was toward the southern end of the lake.

Rackstraw was acquainted with several coves, any of which might have been meant by the dot, and it was determined to steer for the most southern of them, and then to sail northward, making a close search of every suspicious-looking inlet.

At midnight, according to previous arrangements, the Andrew Johnson was got under way, and steamed as quietly from the wharf as possible.

No lights gleamed from her decks, and no signals were shown. One lone fisherman, tacking lakeward, was perhaps the only man that beheld her thus putting to sea, and he stared his amazement, wondering what it meant, and not knowing that she had been privileged to so depart.

The run across the lake was of no great interest, save to Billy Stubbs, who was making his longest, as it was his first, voyage.

But the interest intensified when, the next night, the Michigan shore was approached, and it became known to all that the search had begun.

Still, there came of it nothing to produce any undue excitement. The deserted coves that were entered held nothing to indicate that they were, or had ever been, the den of a band of smugglers.

But the ensuing night there came an event to arouse every man.

A light was seen displayed on a lonely part of the shore line; and it flashed out and disappeared at such regular intervals that there was no doubt it was meant as a signal for some person or vessel.

The Andy Johnson was lying well out in the lake at the time, but the light was distinctly visible to those on board.

After waiting an hour or more for the vessel to run in, should one have been signaled, the Andy Johnson was put about, and a short southerly run was made, which brought the steamer close to land at a point where heavy forest growth came quite down to the water.

Rackstraw knew of no harbor, so the anchor was let go there, and several boat's crews went ashore, in charge of Captain Stebbins and Chicago Charlie. They were heavily armed, in anticipation of a fight should the smugglers be discovered, and Rackstraw and Billy Stubbs were of the number.

The boats were landed on the sandy, wooded point, and left there in charge of a few men; while the others stole through the woods in the direction in which the light had been seen.

When it was thought the place must be near, Chicago Charlie and Jack Rackstraw crept on in advance, leaving the men, under command of Stebbins, to await the results of their investigations.

They were gone a long time—so long that Stebbins almost lost his proverbial patience.

And this is what they saw, and what they heard:

At the extreme end of the cove, almost hidden from view by the heavy timber and dense undergrowth, was found a small camp of log houses.

The smuggler sloop lay in the cove. It had been the vessel for whose benefit the signal lights had been displayed, and it had been not long at anchor.

There were but few lights in the log houses, but most of the members of the Lakeside League were grouped about a small fire near the water's edge.

Chicago Charlie was almost beside himself with excitement. He seemed so near a solution of the mysteries that had so vexed and puzzled him; so near, perhaps, to the woman he loved, and who had treated him so strangely, that he was on the point of losing his head and bringing discovery on himself and companion.

"Jist take it cool, mate!" Rackstraw urged. "I know how you feel, I reckon, sence I've got a girl now t'other side the lake what's a-waitin' an' watchin' for mel. But a-rushin' and hustlin' bain't the things that's goin' to win in this here game. Coolness is the little joker what'll rake in the pot."

The advice and caution was altogether so good and sensible that the Columbia Detective strove to control his excitement and to regain his old-time caution.

Bit by bit, they worked round the border of the fringing trees, until they reached a point to the rear of the log cabins.

Selecting one of these, from which there came both a light and the sound of voices in conversation, they drew near. Something in the tones—though the words were still indistinguishable—sent an unwonted thrill to the detective's throbbing heart.

They saw that, though they might crawl up to the walls of the house, it would be difficult to look in, for the window was high set; and, therefore, they sought better to accomplish their purpose, which was to see as well as to hear, by mounting a small tree.

A large limb of this extended toward the window, giving them a fairly good view, as well as enabling them to hear all that was being said, for the window was open to the night air.

As soon as Chicago Charlie looked through that window and beheld the faces of the occupants, he started so violently that he came near falling from the branch.

"Steady, mate!" came Rackstraw's warning whisper. "I sympathizes with you, fer I've got a girl—"

The sentence was not completed; for at that moment, Rackstraw, hitching forward, saw what Chicago Charlie saw.

There were two persons in the little room. One was Daisy Malcomb, and the other was John Malcomb.

They were talking in low tones, but the words could be readily understood.

The subject of their conversation was quite as bewildering.

"Why won't you tell me that, father?" Daisy was heard to beg. "I've asked it so many times. It seems to me an explanation is surely due by this time!"

Chicago Charlie drank in the tones with al-

most pitiful eagerness. How long it seemed to him since he had heard the music of that voice! "That's what I want to talk about!" they heard Malcomb declare.

The voice was the voice of John Malcomb, even as the form was his. *He had not been murdered!* He was not dead! More than that one fact concerning him, Chicago Charlie could not hold in his mind at that moment.

"There is an estate in New York," Malcomb was heard to continue, "which is tied up in the most singular manner. I shall tell you about that estate, and then see if you are a true daughter to me!"

"Oh! father, can you doubt it, after what I have done?" came the reproachful question.

"That estate belonged to my father, who has been dead for several years. He took a dislike to me—to me, his only son! The only child, I should have said. The property is worth now two hundred thousand dollars; and it would be mine, every cent of it, but for a nonsensical provision in his will.

"As I said, he took a dislike to me. He cast me off. He said I should no more be considered his son, and all because I would not order my life in accordance with his wishes."

There was a growing pain in the eyes of the girl.

Chicago Charlie had already observed how thin and pale she was—how like a shadow of her former self.

John Malcomb did not notice this look, or, if he did, he did not care to heed it.

"His treatment of me I always thought unjust and cruel. The provision of the will cut me off without a penny, and gave to my children the entire estate—but not until after my death! You see, he thus showed that he feared if they got possession of it during my lifetime, I might get some benefit from it.

"If that was not an outrageously cruel thing for a father to do, then I don't know what to call cruel! He was determined that not a cent of all that money should ever pass through my hands."

Daisy Malcomb had bowed her head and was picking nervously at the chair. No comment passed her lips.

For a moment the silence was so great it might almost be felt. John Malcomb was apparently studying her, and thinking how best to proceed with his narration.

"That will serve as an explanation; and will tell you why I wanted the world to think me dead!"

She glanced up inquiringly.

"Of course the fortune would go to you, Daisy, at my death! But not before. I might live a long time—ten, twenty years! I proceeded to hasten the matter. Not by slaying myself, nor by having another slay me; but by making the world believe I had done the latter.

"You have so often told me how you loved me. I believed that you would be willing to appear in the courts as my daughter, obtain possession of the money; and then we could go away and enjoy it together!"

She bent her head again and did not reply, and once more he anxiously studied her attitude.

"Did you think I could do a thing like that?"

She glanced up, as she put the question, and her hot, tearless eyes held a horrified light.

"Why not?" he demanded; and there was a snarl in the intonation.

"It would be perjury! Not even for my father would I perjure myself!"

"Bah! Nothing of the kind. You would not have to prove me dead. That has already been done. The coroner's record shows that, and all about my untimely taking-off. Those records would make a case. All you need to prove is that you are my daughter!"

The look of horror fled, to be replaced by one of indignant anger.

"And this is why you induced me to come with you, and to write the letter that has forever wrecked my life?"

Chicago Charlie's pulses leaped.

"Is it asking too much?"

"It is asking what I will never do. Never! Never! NEVER!"

Her voice rose to a shriek.

Then she flung herself at Malcomb's feet, crying out, bitterly:

"Oh, papa! take back those words. Tell me you never said it. Tell me that I have been mistaken in you. That you would not—could not do so base and wicked a thing! Let me trust in you again! Let me believe that you are honest and true!"

"And you refuse to do what I ask you?" he demanded, his anger getting the better of him. "Have I schemed for this? Do you refuse to obey me, your father?"

"Oh! I cannot believe that my father asks me to do a thing like that! That he could for a moment harbor the idea! Please tell me it is not so!"

"I ask again, if you will do what I want you to?" he furiously questioned, "I have had quite enough sniffing and tears. You must do what I command! You have been in this sort of temper, half the time since leaving Chicago. Am I to be obeyed or not?"

The Columbian Detective found it difficult to restrain the inclination to launch himself through the window at the scoundrel's head. But Jack Rackstraw's hand was on his arm, held there restrainingly.

"I'm afeared to leave you hyer," Rackstraw whispered, "but don't you think I'd better slide out an' bring up the boys? I'll do it, if you think you can hold yer temper that long!"

"Go, for God's sake!" the Columbian Detective pleaded. "Go! Go! I'll not be able to control myself much longer. Bring 'em up on the run!"

Jack Rackstraw "crawfished" back to the body of the tree, then slid quickly to the ground and disappeared in the dense shadows.

All unconscious of this little scene and dialogue, Malcomb asked again:

"Am I to be obeyed or not?"

"I will never do so base a thing!" Daisy declared getting on her feet, and stiffening with inherent pride. "Never! Never!"

"Then, you are no daughter of mine!" was the assertion. "Begone from here! You never were my daughter, and I refuse to have anything further to do with you."

She seemed petrified.

"Oh, don't stare at me that way!" was the brutal command. "It is the truth. I loved you, or thought I did, as a man should love his own daughter. But that is gone! No; you are not my daughter. So clear out!"

He was beside himself with rage.

"Is it true?" she asked, in tones that were so hollow they made the listening detective shiver. "Tell me again, is it true?"

"Yes, it's true! You are not my daughter. You never were my daughter; and I thank God for it!"

"I thank God, too!" was the solemn and fervent declaration. "My father could never have been so base a thing!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE CRASH OF THE THUNDERBOLT.

JOHN MALCOMB, driven to fury by this declaration, lifted his hand to strike the girl he had taught to call him father.

The sight drove the Columbian Detective to madness.

Grasping an overhanging branch, he swung himself through the window and struck Malcomb to the earth with a furious blow.

At the same instant, almost, there came the crack of a rifle; and the men under Captain Stebbins, who had been hurried up by Rackstraw, gave their charging cheer.

The scene that ensued baffles description. The smugglers about the fire, among whom were Solon Youngblood, seized their weapons, and, retreating toward the shore, attempted a resistance.

But they were scattered at the first volley of the men from the steamer, and broke for the cover of the underbrush.

Rackstraw gave them no heed, but made a wild dash for the cabin occupied by John Malcomb and the girl. There were sounds coming from it that made him anxious. He had heard the shout of the Columbian Detective, when the latter had precipitated himself to the cabin floor; and now screams arose.

Thrusting open the door, he saw Chicago Charlie engaged in tying the hands of the arch-conspirator, and again heard the cries of the bewildered and scared girl.

He sprang toward her, but Chicago Charlie was the first to gain her side.

And, Rackstraw, remembering his own experiences in meetings and partings from the idol of his bosom, discreetly turned away, giving his undivided attention to the fallen man.

Malcomb glared up at him like a caged beast. The scoundrel had not been hit by the bullet sent speeding after him down the stairway, as Rackstraw was quick to discover. No doubt he had stumbled and dropped the Infant Wonder, through fright.

"Needn't look at me as if you wanted to eat me!" Rackstraw commented. "I hain't no sugar man."

Then, he bent to an investigation of the knots made by Chicago Charlie, to be sure they were strong and secure.

Outside, a lively scene was being enacted.

Solon Youngblood, who was no coward, was leading such of his men as had not bolted from his side, in a desperate counter-charge, in the hope of gaining the sloop. There were a few men on board the vessel, and these were climbing wildly around, trying to hoist the anchor and to set sail, for a breeze was springing up from off the land.

Captain Stebbins rallied his followers to repel the charge of Youngblood's force, and for a time a desperate combat raged on the sandy shore of the lonely inlet.

But the rascally crew of the smuggler was no match for the trained men under command of Stebbins. Inch by inch, they were forced back, until they broke again; and Stebbins's men scattered them like chaff.

Two or three had been killed, and one of

the men of the steamer was said to be mortally wounded. In addition, there were stabs and minor injuries; and pistol wounds, without number.

Youngblood was among the prisoners taken; and, when he saw that he could not escape, one of his first questions concerned Mrs. Youngblood. She had been in one of the log huts, but had not been seen since the beginning of the attack; nor was she ever afterward seen by any who might have desired her arrest.

John Malcomb had been dragged into another house, away from the sight of Daisy, and there he was raving out his fierce anger and venomous hate.

Rackstraw's was the command that caused the removal of the miserable prisoner, whose wicked scheming and unhallowed plans had so suddenly come to naught.

As for Daisy and the Columbian Detective, the former was hysterically happy and unhappy by turns, while the latter, with pulsing exultation, held her in an embrace that he almost hoped might last forever, and listened to her incoherent attempts to explain why she had written that awful letter and afterward fled with the man whom she believed to be her father.

To follow and record her halting sentences, and Chicago Charlie's rapturous and pitying exclamations, would require pages. But the substance can be compressed into a few paragraphs:

She had thought her father dead, until one night, when he walked into her room, frightening her sorely. Then he explained that he had not been killed, or even injured, but that all that had been done had been only a pretense. He claimed that he had got into trouble, which would force him to leave the city, and to remain in hiding for some time; that it had been brought about by some business transactions, which had been perfectly fair and honorable so far as he was concerned; but to which he had been instigated by partners and agents, of whose criminal deeds he had no previous knowledge. That they had charged him with being an accomplice; and so he must fly.

He said he had sold his city property to Solon Youngblood, who was ready to take immediate possession. And he had begged Daisy to accompany him; and by systematic lying had induced her to do so.

He also made her think the idea was abroad that she had killed her own father; and had caused her to promise that she would leave no trace or letter by which the officers could follow her.

It was a pitiful story, pitifully told; of confidence and daughterly love abused.

She had been taken first to Detroit, and afterward to the cove; where she had since remained, shocked by the companions which Malcomb had seen fit to gather about him. In addition, she had been depressed by his reticence, and had wondered more than once if his representations had been as true, and his business dealings as honorable, as he had maintained.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A DEFIANT DEVIL.

"I DEFY you to do your worst. You can only imprison me! I haven't murdered anybody!—no, nor I haven't been murdered!"

The scene was a cell in a city prison, whither John Malcomb had been borne after the return from the Michigan Cove.

Chicago Charlie was present, and so was Jack Rackstraw; and also another, who was a prison guard.

John Malcomb had grown defiant, obstinate and self-willed. No doubt he realized that the hopes of his life were blasted, and that no worse could come to him than had already come. His carefully-laid plans had failed. He would never have the handling of the fortune he had so cunningly schemed to obtain; and when he should go from prison a free man again, his record and the knowledge of his crimes would turn the hand of every man against him.

Realizing this to its full, he was bitter and insolent; and inclined to glory in a past which held only shame.

"You can't more than jail me!" he snarled again, "and I reckon I can stand a few months or years of that if I have to. As for those who helped me, they're beyond your reach. All except Youngblood. And he would have been if he hadn't made that last fool fight. As for me, I wasn't given any show."

The look he bent on Chicago Charlie was withering in its hate, but the latter only smiled good-humoredly.

"We are prepared to admit your cleverness, Malcomb. You were deucedly clever. Too clever for me, I must confess."

The statements were made with a purpose; that purpose being to flatter John Malcomb into a further confession.

Malcomb laughed harshly, and with a sort of satanic glee.

"You police think you are very smart, but you are only a set of wooden-heads, after all."

And the great, blustering Columbian Detective!—he can't tell a dead man when he sees one!"

He laughed again, showing his teeth in a cruel way.

His face had grown thin and hatchety, and his eyes were so bright and hollow that he was not a pleasant sight to contemplate. Deep down in the depths of each eye there lurked a dancing devil, that now and then took on a shape of fire.

"How did you do it, anyway?" Chicago Charlie ventured to question.

"Easy. Why, it was the easiest thing in the world. I wanted that fortune of two hundred thousand, and I had to die to get it. If I'd 'a' died really, you see, it wouldn't have done me any good. So I just pretended to die. Magruder and some more of the boys helped me, for which they were to have had half of the fortune, if the scheme had worked.

"Well, it didn't work, though that was no fault of mine! The scheme was a good one. Magruder knew of a drug, which he'd run across in some of his Gypsyish wanderings, that would give to whoever swallowed it the semblance of death. He secured it, got a cup of blood from a slaughtering establishment, and then we were ready for the trick."

A scowl flitted for a moment across his face.

"Curse that fool Magruder! I'd like to choke him, yet. He had to muddle things straight from the start, instead of obeying orders! He thought he knew more about it than I did, who was the most interested. I think, too, he was a little afraid of the police.

"So he got that dancing-girl from the Cairo street to steal the knife from Daisy's room. If it hadn't been for that visit of the girl to Daisy's room, and the ring he took from my hand, you'd never have got on the trail of the thing."

The scowl faded to be followed by a smile.

"I thought that fool of an Englishman would never go away that night; and he wouldn't, likely, if I hadn't claimed to be mad over that betting offer and ordered him into the street. Poor old Walesey! How the boys did bleed him! And they kept it up after my supposed death, and got thousands and tens of thousands out of him, I guess, with which they pretended to bribe policemen and detectives who were said to be wanting to arrest him for murdering me. I think, if I was Walesey, I'd kill Youngblood for that, yet!"

The recollection was so exceedingly pleasing that he laughed aloud.

Then the scowl came back, and he continued:

"When we were all ready, I dipped my finger in the blood and scratched that nonsense on the wall, to mislead you smart fellows of the police force; and then Magruder got in his artistic work on my back, painting a place to look like a wound with blood crusted round it. After which we sopped my clothing in the blood; poured the balance of it on the floor; and I laid down in it, with my finger pointed toward the nonsense on the wall; and Magruder gave me the drug.

"I was a little bit afraid to swallow it, not being right sure there mightn't be a dead man found there, sure enough, in the morning; and I shouldn't have taken it; I reckon, if I hadn't known that Magruder was as much interested in having me pull through all right, as I was in pulling through all right.

"You see, if the drug had finished me, that two hundred thousand wouldn't have been among the possibilities, and Magruder would have lost all chance of sharing it.

"So I swallowed the stuff. And it was powerful enough to kill, seems to me; for I hadn't much more than downed it than I began to feel the numbing effects; and in ten minutes I couldn't have moved a hand or batted an eye for the life of me.

"And that's the way you and Walesey found me in the morning!"

"But the coroner and his jury! I confess I didn't look closely at the supposed wound. But how did you manage to deceive them?"

Malcomb winked unpleasantly.

"I didn't deceive them. They deceived you and the public. They—every mother's son of them—were Lakeside Leaguers; and those were the men who were to share with the Gypsy chief the half of the fortune."

"And the undertaker?"

"Another Leaguer!" chuckling in horrible glee. "Oh, it was a daisy lay-out, and a scheme to fool the Old Boy! I don't wonder you were deceived. But you can't get them! They have all skipped."

"Then you weren't buried, nor anything of the kind?"

"I went into the coffin, but I didn't go into the ground. And a deuced unpleasant night I spent in that box, too. It gives me the creeps, yet, to think of it.

"When the coffin went to the cemetery, there was a counterfeit John Malcomb in it; and I was looking out from a window to see that the solemn cortege wound all right on its way. The Gypsy had come in the night, stolen me away and brought the bloom back to my erstwhile faded cheek, and Richard was himself again!"

He laughed, as if he felt the clever trick to have been one worthy of honor; and his utter

heartlessness was unpleasantly revealed by the fact that he could thus treat the girl who believed in and loved him.

"The only thing that troubled me," he laughingly commented, "was that I dared not tell any of you wise officers how far you were off the track;—but it did me good to know that you were thrashing this way and that, hunting for my supposed murderer."

CHAPTER XL.

A SINGULAR REVELATION.

THE morning that witnessed the return of the captured Lakeside Leaguers found Selwyn Fisher dead in his room; he having died, as the doctors said, of alcoholism.

Not much had been seen of Walesey since his attack on Jackstraw in the Ferris Wheel. He had been given a preliminary hearing on the charge of assault with intent to kill, and had been released under bond to await a regular trial.

It was known that he had been drinking heavily;—even more heavily than before, if that were possible.

There were few or none to mourn his demise, except certain members of the sporting fraternity. He had lived a fast life.

When his effects were searched, a most singular letter or confession was discovered in his trunk. It had been written some time before; and, as it seemed, in anticipation of death.

The confession covered a number of foolscap pages, and was, therefore, too long to quote.

It began by giving a short history of his life, stating that he was born in England and was forty-five years of age. He had come unlawfully in the possession of a large sum of money, three fourths of which was already dissipated. There were only twenty or thirty thousand dollars of it left; and he considered himself on the brink of poverty.

To a man of his habits and style of living it probably appeared to be a very small sum, for he had spent more than half that much in the year preceding his death.

The points of most interest to the readers of this story, concerned the fortune. It had been inherited, according to English custom, by his elder brother, who was also his only brother.

This brother, having become wildly infatuated with a Gypsy woman, had wandered off and had married her. Afterward he had died; though not till two children had been born to this marriage.

It was not known to the public that there were such children, though the fact was well known to Selwyn Fisher; for his brother had written to him at various times.

Selwyn Fisher saw, as he thought, an opportunity to acquire his brother's fortune. In the absence of children he would have been the next of kin; and the temptation came to him to pretend ignorance of these children and to take the property.

When an investigation showed him that the mother was also dead—she having died shortly after the father—the temptation became irresistible. Selwyn claimed the property; and, having converted it into cash, sailed for America. What remained of the fortune was now in one of the Chicago banks. He had never invested any of it, nor done anything except to draw freely on his bank account.

He stated that he wrote this confession to do justice to the heirs, though he had not sufficient strength of will or manhood to give up the money while he lived.

Then came the startling statement:

"I have been acquainted with one of these heirs for more than a year. She is the girl known as Daisy Malcomb, and commonly supposed to be John Malcomb's daughter. The other heir I have not known so long. He is the newsboy, Billy Stubbs!

"I once saw my brother's wife, the Gypsy woman. She was exceedingly handsome, and I don't wonder that my brother fell in love with her. I know I should have done so, if in his place. The girl called Daisy Malcomb is her living image. That was the fact which first attracted my attention to her.

"One day, in conversation with Solon Youngblood, he told me she was not Malcomb's daughter; and then I knew that she was my brother's child. Malcomb had found her in an almshouse or orphanage, or some such place. Malcomb was a married man at the time, and had no children. He desired an heir; and so he took the girl, and called her his daughter. But when I first knew him, he had no living wife.

"Billy Stubbs, whose real name is Marlton Fisher—and the name of the girl is Gertrude Fisher!—looks as much like my dead brother, except as to age, as the girl resembles her dead mother. Zel Magruder says the boy is a Gypsy. Of course, I cannot be sure that he is my brother's child, though I am sure of it as I am of anything I can't plainly prove. If he is a Gypsy, I know he is my nephew, for his face is my brother's face.

"John Malcomb never had a child by his wife; though he did, or rather has, a child by

another woman. He told me that, himself, one day as we were driving through the streets. We saw the newsboy, Billy Stubbs, leading a small boy by the hand.

"Do you see that brat?" said Malcomb to me. I told him I did; and then he said the 'brat' was his; but that he didn't care just then to own it. He said he would have taken it home and acknowledged it as his, only he was sure Daisy would kick up a row. These are his words as near as I can remember them."

But a small part of the confession—which was a record of the man's life—has been quoted. Only that part pertaining to the characters of this story. For the rest, there is not space; nor would it be of great interest.

It was evident, though, that the dead man had set down only truths. The statement that Christopher Columbus Stubbs was John Malcomb's son, explains why Malcomb had desired to kidnap the boy from the kindergarten; and when Malcomb was approached on the subject and shown the words of Selwyn Fisher, he acknowledged their correctness.

"I didn't really want the boy," he declared, "only as he would help me. I thought if Daisy went back on me, I could have the boy put forward by some one as the heir, and through him I could get hold of the fortune. Yes, I told Fisher the boy was mine; and of course, in the absence of other heirs, he would have come in for the fortune left by that fool father of mine.

"As for Daisy, I knew she was dark, but I never knew she was a Gypsy. Fisher never breathed that to me. No doubt he was afraid, for I would have been wanting her to have the money he was fingering. I don't suppose there's much of it left, and I don't care. I got a good deal of it while it was going!

"Fisher was not one of the Leaguers. He was too big a fool to have been admitted there. I must give the fellow credit, though. I didn't really believe he was such a rascal as he makes out. You can't always tell a man by the way he looks. I thought he was only a fat whisky and beer guzzler, and a sucker of the greenest sort.

"If he was alive, I'd beg his pardon for thinking so poorly of him!"

CHAPTER XLI.

CONCLUSION.

THE scene shifts again, and for the last time.

This time it reveals Zel Magruder, with body water-swollen, and sightless eyes staring up at the dirty peak of the tent, in whose interior he had been temporarily placed.

He had rowed and sailed for the last time on Lake Michigan.

The tent was that of the crone, Gypsy Nell, and the crone was bending moaningly above him. She had not loved him, even though he had been distantly related to her, but she was realizing now that after all "blood is thicker than water!"

They had had many quarrels, had bickered constantly, had nurtured the demon of hate, and the woman had even turned against him and sought to injure him by causing his arrest—still he was a Gypsy, blood of the Gypsy blood; and because of that she wrung her hands and poured out her lamentations.

There were others in the tent: Chicago Charlie, Jack Rackstraw, Billy Stubbs, a policeman and a Columbian guide.

Zel's boat had been overturned that morning on the lake, in front of the Exhibition grounds. The accident had been seen, but not in time to effect his rescue. And at the request of Chicago Charlie the body, when taken from the water, had been borne to the Gypsy encampment, instead of to a morgue.

He felt it was the proper place for it, as that was the Gypsy's home; and, besides, he had a purpose to serve in making the request. He desired further light thrown on the parentage of Billy Stubbs; and hoped the crone, who had grown sullen and uncommunicative, might be driven by the fate of Magruder into making further statements.

It will be seen that Zel Magruder had not left the city, as he told the dancing-girl he meant to do.

He had basely deceived the Ghawazee in many things. Thinking to impress her with his prowess, he had made her believe he had killed John Malcomb; and the theft of the knife he had more than once held over her head as a menacing club to bend her to his will.

Yet, in spite of it, she had loved him. So strange a thing is love!

She had been guilty of no evil intentions, doing what she did through a desire to aid the Gypsy and his friends. It was this that had caused her to become the bearer of mysterious and warning messages between Magruder and Youngblood, and had caused her to commit other indiscretions.

She had returned to the Cairo Street, when she knew she was not to be punished, and when it became certain that Zel Magruder had lied to her. This lying deceit of the Gypsy had been made plain, at a surreptitious interview had between them on the night of their flight from the officers in the Gypsy

tent. Zel still claimed then to love her, but he did not want her to accompany him, and she departed from him in disgust. She was not only a Gypsy, but she was oriental in her changeable fickleness.

Chicago Charlie questioned the crone, who had ceased her moanings and turned to the men who had brought in Zel's body.

"Yes," she admitted, in reply to his questions, "what I said about the newsboy being a Gypsy, is all true. I don't know about the girl that you call Daisy, though I had suspicions about her when she came here to have her fortune told."

"But the boy was once, for a short time, with this band in England. He was a little chap, but I am sure I am not mistaken. His father came to visit us one day, bringing the boy with him. The father was not Gypsy, but he said the boy was half Gypsy. I thought I recognized the boy's face when I first saw it, though that visit was so long ago. The face hadn't changed much. He looks like the man, now, more than he did then; but it is the same face."

"Yes, I am sure he is of the Gypsy blood!"

The proof—what additional proof was needed—was secured to give to Daisy and the newsboy their inheritance; and it was secured through the exertions of the Columbian Detective.

He is Daisy's husband, now, and Billy Stubbs makes his home with them. Likewise, the Infant Wonder, who is the richest of the lot, for he has come into possession of the magnificent New York estate which his father, John Malcomb, schemed so hard and vainly to obtain.

As Jack Rackstraw said, when he heard it: "The Infant Wonder forever! 'Rah! 'Rah! Hip!"

Rackstraw expects to marry pretty Lilly Lilac at no distant day, and in consequence there is no happier man above ground.

He and Chicago Charlie, and the newsboy—who is a newsboy no longer, but who is still called Billy Stubbs—are rapidly becoming a famous trio of detectives, and a terror to the evil-doers of Chicago and the harpies of the great World's Fair.

Solon Youngblood and John Malcomb—perhaps the least said of them the better!—are in prison garb, learning the sad and old, old lesson, so difficult for mankind to learn—that "the way of the transgressor is hard!"

THE END.

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